

IN QUEST OF GOD

Maneri's Second Collection of 150 Letters

Maniri, Sharaf al-Din Ahmad bin Aliya

TRANSLATION, INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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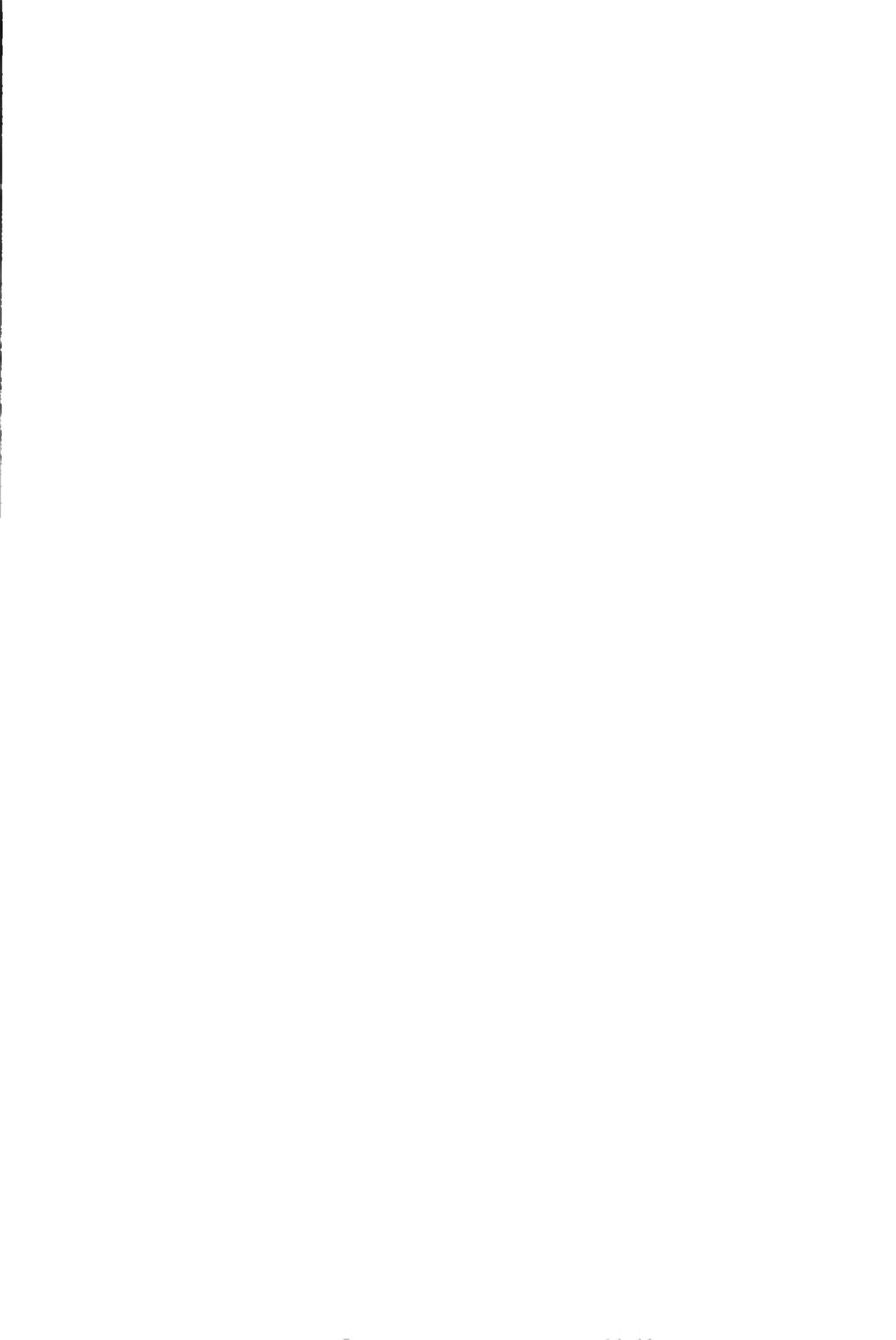
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Dedicated

to

The People of Bihar



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INTRODUCTION

In order to appreciate the letters contained in this volume it will be a great help to find out something about the man who wrote them, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as 'Sharaf'.¹ This will be followed by an introduction to the letters themselves.

Sharafuddin Maneri

The tomb of Sharafuddin Maneri is in the town of Bihar Sharif, eighty kilometres south-east of Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar in North India. The word 'Sharif' was added after his death in order to indicate that the town was 'honoured' by his tomb. An impressive array of buildings is found in the vicinity of the tomb itself, known as a *dargah* (threshold). It is the most popular Muslim shrine in Bihar. A very large crowd of many thousands gathers there for the annual feast-day celebrations, marking Maneri's death anniversary, and known as the *urs* (wedding), the day on which the saint was united to God. People come to honour him and make special prayers of petition to him, thus acknowledging that he is very close to God. It is believed that God will listen to Maneri when he intercedes on behalf of devotees who pray to him. This makes eminent sense to ordinary people living in Bihar. If they have dealings with government officials they strive to meet someone who has some influence over the official involved and make their approach through that person. Such a person, even in Hindi, is called a 'source.' Thus, even though Maneri died in 1381, more than 620 years ago, he nevertheless still plays an important role in the lives of Muslims and others in Bihar. On his feast day senior government officials of the district approach his tomb in procession in order to pay their respects, no matter what their own religion may be. This is a very ancient custom. It is still strictly, even though entirely voluntarily, observed. The sense of universal local respect is palpable.

Thus we are dealing with a person who is still very much 'alive' and influential. His 'representative' is his descendant, the present Shah Sahib or *Sajjada Nashin*. He lives in the *Khanqah*, on the premises granted to Maneri at the instance of the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq, around 1337. People come to him for advice and to request his prayers and blessings.

What do we know about the man himself, who died on 2nd January 1381, so many years ago? The popular story runs along these lines.

He was born in Maner – hence the name, 'Maneri,' meaning 'of Maner' - in 1263. He went to study in Sonargaon, near modern Dhaka, along with a scholar from Delhi, Abu Tau'ama, who passed through Maner en route to Sonargaon. He returned to Maner in 1291 after the death of his father, Yahya, but soon set off for

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Delhi, after entrusting his young son, Zakiuddin, to his mother's care. In Delhi he became the disciple of Najibuddin Firdausi. After a short time there he was on his way back to Maner but disappeared into the jungle of Bihia to be alone with God. He spent about thirty years in the jungle and in a cave in Rajgir and then began to come to Bihar for the Friday prayer. So many people began to come to see him that he ended up living in Bihar for about fifty years. His death date is accurately recorded as 2nd January 1381.

Two points in this narrative are quite striking. The first is that he lived to the ripe old age of 117 years, according to the Gregorian calendar; and secondly, that he spent about thirty years in seclusion. As the first collection of letters that he wrote to Qazi Shamsuddin, the *Maktubat-i Sadi*, (*The Hundred Letters*), is clearly dated as 1346-7, this means that he would have been eighty-three years of age when he wrote them, and a hundred and five when the present collection was made.

A study was undertaken on the basis of the evidence provided by Maneri's own writings, especially material culled from the various *malfuzat* collections (recorded discourses), and also from his chief disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, as well as Muzaffar's nephew, Husain Mu'izz Balkhi. This evidence was set against the known history of the period.² It quickly became evident that the death date was correct, so investigations focussed on his birth and earlier years. Without going into details, the following picture, based on the evidence presented in *The Way of a Sufi: Sharafuddin Maneri*, can be sketched.

Maneri was born in Maner about 1290. He did his preliminary schooling in Maner itself and then went along with Maulana Abu Tau'ama to Sonargaon in 1304 or later and studied there under him. He fell sick there and the physicians recommended intercourse. He procured a slave girl, by whom he had one son, Zakiuddin. He left Sonargaon in 1323, along with his young son, and returned to Maner. Entrusting his son to the care of his mother, he set out with his elder brother, Khaliluddin, in search of a spiritual guide in Delhi. As he met both Bu Qalandar of Panipat, who died in September, 1324, and Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, who died in April, 1325, he probably arrived in Delhi towards the end of 1323 or early 1324. He failed to get a guide – Bu Qalandar was an ecstatic who was not of much help, and Nizamuddin said he wasn't meant to be his guide – and was on the point of returning when, at the insistence of his brother, he went to meet Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi. There was an instant rapport between the two men, and Maneri stayed with him, most probably till Najibuddin's death on 5th October 1332. His tomb is not far from the Qutb Minar complex in New Delhi. There are significantly fewer reminiscences from this Delhi period in the *malfuzat* literature when compared to those that relate to his years in Sonargaon. One gets the impression that he was much more involved in events in his later years in Sonargaon than when he was in Delhi.

When his beloved guide died, there was nothing to keep Maneri in Delhi. He set out on the return journey towards Maner. Shortly before reaching his native place, however, he veered off to the jungle of Bihia. He felt a deep yearning

for God and wished to devote his life totally to the quest for God. The stories related to this period speak of timely assistance being extended by the local Hindu *zamindar*, the most prominent landowner in the area. He probably spent about a year or so in Bihia jungle and then moved to a cave in Rajgir. It is situated near a spring of water at the base of a hill and is today known as *Makhdum Kund*. The cave and the spring now have a number of adjacent buildings. Pilgrims and tourists visit the spot.

Rajgir was, and remains, a holy place because of its association with the Buddha for Buddhists; with Mahavir for Jains; with various sadhus for Hindus; and also with Maneri for Muslims. Maneri went there because it seemed to be a suitable setting in which to continue his quest for God. As his reputation for holiness grew, however, local people began to come and request him to write petitions on their behalf to the local ruler, thus making him their 'source.' A number of men, who were themselves committed to the quest for God, also began to come from Bihar town to consult him. In order to save them the trouble of coming all the way to Rajgir to consult him he began to go to Bihar for the Friday prayer. He would stay on so that people could meet him, and then return to Rajgir. A small dwelling was quickly constructed for him. When Muhammad bin Tughluq, the Sultan of Delhi, heard that Maneri had emerged from the jungle, he ordered the governor of Bihar to construct a fitting *khanqah* for him. This was probably about 1337. From then on, apart from taking time out occasionally for long walks until his legs gave way, he remained in his *khanqah* until his death on 2nd January 1381. His time was devoted to prayer; study; teaching; meeting many visitors; conducting assemblies; and writing letters to disciples who could not come to him. These were rich, fruitful years. The circumstances of his death were lovingly recorded by his faithful secretary, Zain Badr Arabi,³ in words that convey the deep humanity of the man, a trait which strikes the reader of his *Letters*.

The Letters

As the above sketch indicates, Maneri had a rich experience of life. He had a thorough grounding in the religious literature of his day, in Arabic and even more so in Persian. His fondness for Persian mystical verse is evident in the judicious and wide-ranging quotations found in his letters. He also found solace and guidance in the writings of the great Sufis whom he frequently quotes. He had a brief experience of family life but, from the time he left Sonargaon, when he was about thirty-three, he lived as a celibate. He had the experience of living with a kindly, inspiring spiritual guide and then of seeking God and Him alone in the jungle of Bihia and in a cave in Rajgir. Here he also learnt that God wanted him to be of service to others, "bringing comfort to hearts," as he often expressed it. He then spent the rest of his life worshipping God and guiding and inspiring people by his words, deeds and writings. One salient feature of his writings is their evident foundation in personal experience.

His own literary output began with *The Hundred Letters* in 1346. Judging from *Khwan-i Pur Ni'mat*, the second, smaller record of his sayings, dated 8th November, 1348 till 30th December, 1350,⁴ it is possible that the first collection,

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the much larger *Ma'din ul-Ma'ani*, was already under way when Maneri wrote his *Letters*. Zain Badr Arabi was the compiler of all three works. *The Hundred Letters*, written to Qazi Shamsuddin of Chausa, was meant to be an outline of the Sufi Path presented in the form of letters. The work quickly became a great favourite with all those interested in the spiritual life. It was widely copied as far as Delhi to the west; Daulatabad to the south; and Sonargaon to the east. Sultans – such as Muhammad bin Tughluq – had their own personal copies, as well as famous Sufi sheikhs – such as Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dilli – not to mention countless other officials, scholars and followers of the Sufi Path. This popularity perdured in the ensuing centuries. The work was a great favourite with the Emperor Akbar, who had the letters read out to him, while Aurangzeb is said to have kept a copy at his bedside. It also became a basic Sufi text used in *khanqahs* throughout India.

This second collection of a hundred and fifty letters was made over a period of five months beginning on 24th December 1367. The work was concluded in May 1368. Hence the actual work of collecting the letters into one volume was made just over twenty years after the letters in the first collection had been written and despatched. This second collection consists of letters written by Maneri, largely as replies to letters sent to him by various people. Unfortunately the compiler did not think there was any value in keeping those letters, none of which is known to be extant. The letters written in reply extended over a period of many years. Some of them were written to the same person and were arranged together. For example, the first eighteen letters were written to Sheikh Umar^s of the township of Abgila in Gaya District. A few are parts of letters written to Qazi Shamsuddin, the recipient of the letters of the first collection. Some were written to well-known persons, such as Maneri's chief disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, and others to persons about whom we have no knowledge. Some do not even contain the name of an addressee. The letters were written to scholars who wanted to tread the Path to God, or to officials or merchants intent on doing so.

Thus the letters are rooted and grounded in the life-situations of their recipients, and are responses to their expressed aspirations and the difficulties they were encountering. From this fact flows one inescapable dimension of these letters – the element of repetition. It is only natural that Maneri will tend to draw on his favourite stories and poetry in his replies. In the circumstances, repetition is inevitable. Moreover, the editorial preoccupation of the compiler has to be kept in mind. He collected anything of Maneri's that he could lay his hands on. In view of his profound reverence for his guide it can be confidently asserted that the thought of going through the letters and notes in order to delete repetitious material probably didn't even occur to him! When all is said and done, however, the choice facing a modern translator is either to accept the manuscript evidence and present the material found therein; or to undertake a drastic process of editing in view of eliminating repetition, no matter how it arose. This latter option does not seem to be a feasible option in view of the fact that the collection has the authority of over 620 years to support it. Neither should we overlook the element of reverence which perdures.

In two areas, however, editorial authority has been exercised. One is with regard to the abundance of Persian verse. In some letters the verse comes across as a luxuriant creeper which has almost strangled the parent tree. A comparison of several manuscripts made it perfectly clear that many verses had been added later on. For example, a random selection of letters 9,10, 11 and 12 yielded 94, 71, 26 and 61 couplets in different manuscripts.⁶ There is also considerable discrepancy in the verses quoted. Hence MS 1396 (a & b), as found in the Hand List of the Persian MSS in the Khuda Bakhsh Library, was used as the criterion for choosing the verses to be retained. This was because it had the least number of verses, not only in the sample quoted, but also throughout the entire manuscript. In literature of this kind verses are often added, but not deleted.

The second area of editorial activity concerns the number of letters translated. There are many manuscripts containing over two hundred letters⁷ and the preface in one states that there are "just over two hundred letters."⁸ There are manuscripts containing 151 letters.⁹ There are also manuscripts containing only 150 letters.¹⁰ Curiously, one speaks in the beginning of 150 letters, but actually has 151.¹¹ It is clear that the original collection consisted of 150 letters.¹² These are presented here. It also needs to be noted that this is the figure given by the compiler himself.

Before going into some points concerning the *Letters* it will be helpful, yet again, to look at the author, for the ultimate value of these letters lies in the fact that they are the fruit of personal experience, ably expressed in terms of the Islamic spiritual tradition to which Maneri was heir. Young Ahmad was brought up in a deeply religious family environment. His father, Yahya, was a noted Sufi. His mother, Bibi Razia, was the daughter of a Suhrawardi Sufi, Shihabuddin Jagot. As a small child he thus lived and breathed an atmosphere which was permeated by the centrality of God. In addition to all the prescribed prayers and rituals, there were practices inherited from the Sufi tradition. He commenced his schooling in the local school. He was obviously a keen student, for the initiative to go along with Abu Tau'ama to Sonargaon came from him.

He was a serious and very capable student in Sonargaon, but there are reminiscences which show he was not averse to having a little fun, very likely after his bout of sickness; to joining wholeheartedly in the joys and sorrows of others; and to being in contact with the highest circles in Sonargaon, including the Sultan himself

His studies concentrated on *hadith* collections and books of *tafsir*, commentaries on the Quran. The theological perspective presented to him emphasised the supremacy of God's omnipotence and all-pervading causality. Although he was well acquainted with the Quran, and knew many portions by heart, he was not a *hafiz*. This means he did not know the whole Quran by heart, a fact he later lamented. We can finally note that these studies placed a great deal of emphasis on memory and intellect.

When he went back to Maner it is striking that he stayed only a short time there. He went off to Delhi in search of a guide. He also lived for the rest of his life

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as a celibate. It seems that a yearning for something more than the knowledge he had acquired in Sonargaon had taken hold of him. Now he was looking for someone who could guide him along the path he should travel in order to assuage the hunger he experienced in his soul. The presumption has to be that, in addition to the irreplaceable stimulus to growth afforded by his deep and loving association with Najibuddin, he engaged in Sufi exercises, such as the *chilla*, a forty-day retreat, under his guidance, and also soaked himself in Persian mystical verse and in the writings of the Sufis. In this way he entered into the court of the heavenly King, and this experience took hold of him to such an extent that the court of Muhammad bin Tughluq failed to interest him.

At the death of his beloved guide the only thing that interested him was the desire to give himself over wholly to seeking a more intimate union with God. It is obvious that he had experienced God deeply at times, otherwise he would not have shown such little interest in advancement at the Sultan's court, nor would he have gone to live in the jungle, for he was a distinguished scholar with a reputation for holiness.

It was after he moved to his cave in Rajgir that the annoyingly persistent requests to write letters of recommendation on behalf of many people brought about his final transformation. Now he was a man totally devoted to God and, as far as possible, to "bringing comfort to hearts." The rest of his life was lived out in this spirit of worship and service. It also has to be mentioned that his sensitive, caring personality endeared him to all who met him. People were happy to serve him in any way possible. Thus he became known as *Makhdum Sahib*, the "Served One." His gentle, encouraging spirit shines through his *Hundred Letters* in the words that follow the oft-repeated exclamation, "O brother!" He is similarly encouraging in this collection, but we also see him sternly rebuking a senior disciple for what he considered to be a retrograde step at his particular stage of life. Finally, it is in the *Wafat Nama*, the account of his last hours, that his humanity shines forth, eloquently proclaimed by the incredible sense of impending loss felt by his disciples as death drew near.

In this context a few more words can be said about the letters in this collection. The very element of repetition contains a positive dimension, for it embodies Maneri's response to the real-life situations and aspirations of the men who wrote to him. In passing it has to be mentioned that there is no known extant letter written to a woman, but there is a description of a fleeting visit by a lady devotee in the *Wafat Nama*.¹³ Women did not attend the assemblies, but there was nothing to prevent them from meeting Maneri in the context of a personal visit. In this way they could converse with him in the local language. The assemblies, on the other hand, were conducted in Persian.

Maneri obviously has his recipient in mind as he pens his responses. In this sense these are pastoral letters, i.e. letters of spiritual advice and encouragement directed to real people. While this colours the practical advice he proffers, it also dictates the spiritual 'level,' so to say, of his replies. He was well aware that the philosophical adage, *quidquid recipitur per modum recipientis recipitur*, (whatever

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is received is received according to the capacity of the receiver), applies with equal validity to spiritual matters, as his own references to "babes at the breast" and "mature adults" clearly indicate.

One final word seems appropriate. It must never be forgotten that Maneri lived in fourteenth-century India, mainly in Bihar, in a culture and world-view that had its strong points as well as its weaknesses and drawbacks. He thrived on the former, but could not be expected to emerge unscathed by the latter. What is of perennial interest, however, is what this extraordinary man has to say about the quest for God as he experienced it in his own life and as he endeavoured to share the fruit of this experience with others. Because of the quantity of material presented, including its repetitive aspect, the reader is eminently capable of coming to a personal appreciation of what Maneri says about what it means to be *In Quest of God*.

The *notes* at the end of the text are meant mainly to share what information is available about persons referred to etc. Some comments could not be avoided, but the aim has been to keep them to a minimum. They should in no way be construed as supplying a commentary on the letters. The whole thrust of the work has been to provide the reader with as accurate and as readable an English rendition of the original Persian as possible. The *notes* are incidental and can be ignored if so desired.

What does Maneri actually say about being *In Quest of God*, a phrase taken from his letters and expressive of their contents? This question requires a personal answer from the reader. In one sense, it can be answered reasonably quickly. In another sense, the answer comes quite slowly, depending on how steadfast the reader is in seeking God, and how God decides to bless the efforts of this particular person who is seeking Him.

COMPILER'S PREFACE¹⁴

All praise be to God Who gave the sheikhs the grace to disclose secrets, as far as it is permitted to do so, and who enabled disciples, through their efforts and influence, to grasp the secrets contained therein. Through the blessings of those excellent sheikhs they were kept safe from evils of body and soul and, by means of various kinds of lights and manifestations, the veils covering their hearts were removed. Praise also be to Muhammad, His prophet and apostle, as well as to his family, companions and community!

After the completion of one hundred letters addressed to Qazi Shamsuddin, administrator of the populous township of Chausa, and after that collection had achieved fame in both east and west, these excellent letters also, numbering one hundred and fifty,¹⁵ are joined to them for the renewal of those who desired and wished for them.

Our revered teacher, the sheikh of the age, the source of peace and tranquillity, the refinement of the Law, the receptacle of subtle meanings, the investigator into the Reality of all realities, the teacher of external obligations, the one who discloses divine secrets to those close to God, the one who banishes innovations from religion, the one who establishes the proper attitudes in religion, the one who leads people to the heights, the receiver of great blessings, the one who removes the darkness of sin from hearts and makes them shine, the one who will intercede for sinners on the Day of Judgement, the one who leads disciples to God, their goal, the one who comes to the help of those who cry out to him, the one who reminds people of the holy men of bygone ages, the one who goes ahead of one and all, who is he? Sharaf ul-Millat wad-Din, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, whose face in either world is turned towards God alone! May God bless him with a long life for the welfare of Muslims and so that the blessing of seeing him may greatly enrich one and all!

ENCOMIUM

I give thanks at the divine threshold,
Even though this is not an easy task.
Among the sheikhs and theologians,
His essence is like a dazzling wedding gift.
In this age, full of unbelief and ignorance,
His speech is the pure path of faith.
Whatever is difficult along the path of faith,
Finds a hundred explanations on his tongue.

His status cannot be expressed in words:
It is a thousand times greater than what I say.
I wanted to say a hundred and one things:
To do so correctly is the task of men.
A cry from heaven has found a human voice:
It is not your work, but that of the Beautiful One.
With an existence stained by sin,
Remember the pure ones as compensation.
The qualities of God's saints are the work of God:
They are described at length in the Quran.
If someone praises himself, it stems from ignorance:
Such a one resembles a child imprisoned in a well.
Those who praise the secret of his reticence,
Find themselves tongue-tired.
All the sciences and knowledge of this age
Are of little value compared to his grace.
His friends are always joyful:
Therefore those who envy him weep.
It is not Ashraf Rukn who praises him:
It is the task of the pure ones to praise his essence.
O Lord, make me the dust beneath his feet!
Place it on my head, even though unworthy of it.
Being all apology for his deficient service,
He wants to be sorry because of it.
If he is accepted, it's not surprising:
Doing good is a necessary quality of his.
In the hope of being accepted by him,
He spends his days and nights at his door.
All who serve him become free,
Even a king, if he comes to his door.
While writing this, boldness vanished,
And the soul shakes like a willow.
May the sheikh's writing produce abundant fruit,
O Lord, as far as this is possible!

On different occasions and at particular times, according to the capacity of the person seeking advice, not according to his own knowledge, he used his blessed pen to write letters and ordered them to be sent to eager seekers. Some of them were sent to disciples, while others were sent to faithful friends who were prevented from being of service to him and being present in the honoured assembly and hearing his gracious words. All those who were staying in towns and villages were writing to him for guidance; telling him about their distress and extreme helplessness; also opening themselves fully to him; and explaining their problems to him. These people were prevented by distance from frequent personal exchange. Moreover, because of a paucity of goods and means they were unable to reach his sublime court or cut themselves off completely from their affairs. If a

COMPILER'S PREFACE

morsel of knowledge from the hidden world and from subtle meanings could be penned for them, then those suffering from the trials of the age and the entanglements of their deceitful souls and, through lack of means, were unable to be in attendance at the exalted threshold and illustrious court, which they consider to be a sign of evil days as well as of their personal misfortune, could at least prove this saying to be true: "The person who is not blessed with vision has to be content with signs."

By studying what the friend of the age says about rectitude, guidance, wealth, blessings, strength and energetic enterprise along the path of religion and in the work of attaining certainty; about subduing the selfish soul through asceticism and struggle; and about whatever is difficult in proceeding along the path of religion, a person picks up what he explains in his writings, according to the command: "They are the best of men in this world and the most merciful in the world to come." He sent fitting replies, writing as much as possible about the affairs of the state and situation of each person. He wrote with his own blessed hand and ordered the letters to be sent to the addressees. He also sent some to people who were devoted to him, concerning what had befallen them, even without their asking him. He did this to ensure that they did not exceed the bounds of the Law and to enable them to gain strength by reading some verses from the Quran; some traditions of the Prophet; and some of the stories and writings which constitute our heritage. His desire was for them to have this abundant wealth and so commanded the letters to be sent in all directions through travellers.

This servant, but dust upon the exalted threshold, asked for copies of letters, either written by friends or by his blessed pen, and took it upon himself to have them transcribed, whether they were short or long, or even simply brief notes, for they are full of meaning, not simply of words. Only if it were correct to allow the Word of the Lord Most Exalted and the traditions of the Messenger to perish would it be correct to allow the writings of the sheikhs to perish!

Thus this poor person, from the first of the month of Jumada ul-Awwal till the last day of the blessed month of Ramazan, 769 A.H. (1368 A.D.), put into this collection whatever he collected. If any more letters are sent to anyone, and he gets a chance to make a copy of them, then he will make another collection, so that any believer who receives this eternal wealth and good fortune, and is granted grace and is enriched by these letters and writings, may, as far as possible, act upon them. It is hoped that he will be accorded a portion together with the holy ones. May God cherish with His grace the person He chooses!

Bestow a portion of the wine from your cup upon us!

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Letter 1

THE PATH OF RELIGION

To Sheikh Umar.¹⁶ My very dear brother, Sheikh Umar, residing in the township of Abgila,¹⁷ prayerful greetings¹⁸ from the writer of these lines! Study the matter and realize¹⁹ that the prophets can be compared to physicians and people to the sick, while the Quran is like a storehouse of medicines. "Whatever comes from the Quran is therapeutic," and every explanation is a medicine and a sherbet for the various ailments of the people. "We have written much in the Book."²⁰ In other words, there is no religious or worldly matter needed by the people which We have not mentioned in the Quran. Until a person has traversed the path of religion, however, and seen the reality of the work,²¹ he will not understand.

The sun is not to blame if someone does not see.²²

O brother, treading the way to the reality of the Lord Most Exalted is an extraordinary task. It cannot be undertaken except by the heart. It experiences joy and sorrow, sickness and health. There is, however, a prescription which is known by physicians of the heart, namely, the prophets and, after them, scholars of the life to come, for they have inherited the knowledge of the prophets. In their message for today they authenticate the Seal of the Prophets.²³ Undoubtedly there is something very important here for you and me and the likes of us. Let us humbly serve a just man and thus traverse the path of the religion of the Exalted God of Glory. We do this in order to perceive the reality of the work and in this way become physicians of the ailments of the heart. It has been expressed thus:

Son, the Way is long and full of danger:
Each traveller needs a guide.
How can a blind man walk straight?
He errs in travelling without a staff!
If you have pain, and a guide appears,
You will have a key to release your pain.

A genuine scholar is such a person, not one called a scholar by the people or reputed to be such. The preservers of Prophetic traditions and narrators of Prophetic words, and other leaders, are different from contentious people. These are like donkeys carrying books. Religious scholars, however, are different, being like the prophets, for "the scholars of my community are like the prophets of the sons of Israel," as the Messenger²⁴ affirms. "There is no prophet for whom there is no example among his people," is the saying of Khwaja Fuzail Iyaz.²⁵ Whoever said the following spoke correctly:²⁶

A guide for the Way is like the philosopher's stone:²⁷
 His breast is like a dark-green ocean.
 There are guides today, but they are hidden,
 While worthless fellows are seen in Sufi garb.

As for you and me, and the likes of us, no activity or repose purely for the sake of God is possible apart from a Leader of the Age.²⁸ Such devotion would be acceptable, not because of us, but because of him, namely that Leader of the Age. When a guest is held in high esteem, undoubtedly anyone who accompanies him is also welcome. For one and all the command of the Law is: "If you do not know, ask someone who does," so that whatever anyone does should be in accordance with the command of a Leader of the Age. Even if it be a fault, it would not be considered so. Such actions would be rewarded. On the other hand, if they act on their own initiative, even though their action is meritorious, it would be an offence and would be punished. The basis for this is that privileged people are commanded to advance in accordance with their own knowledge and personal interpretation, while ordinary people are commanded to move ahead according to the knowledge and interpretation of the privileged ones, not according to their own desire. Whatever happens according to their own desire would be an airy nothing, not religion. It is one thing to worship the air, but quite another to worship God!

Don't you see that, if an ordinary man divorces his wife before consummation of the marriage, there is a consensus that the man has to have recourse to a religious scholar who is, in his estimation, of good standing. Imagine this man gives a legal decision concerning a divorce before consummation, allowing him to remarry, and the man does so. All religious scholars know that this decision is faulty²⁹ but, in spite of this, that ordinary man would not be accused of any offence in this matter. If he had remarried her without having had recourse to a religious scholar, however, and had acted according to his own desire, he would certainly be a sinner, even though he did the right thing. There are many precedents for this. Here an apt couplet applies:

How can a blind man walk straight?
 He errs in travelling without a staff!

Upon reaching this stage, you might say: "Whatever is clearly devotional should be performed. What need is there for any command?" O brother, it occurred to Usman bin Affan³⁰ that he should give in alms whatever he possessed. Why shouldn't he do so? He did not say that it was a point of devotion, and what command is there for that? One day, he had recourse to the Prophet, who said to him: "Renounce it all, so that it might be yours!" There are also many precedents for this in the books of the Sufis. These subtle points are far from the understanding of externalists and those occupied with appearances, for learning the secrets of the Law and the realities of religion is the work of men endowed with insight and scholars of the life to come,³¹ for they have a different spiritual perception and understanding, as has been said:

Masters of the heart differ in taste and understanding:

Their understanding lies beyond both worlds.
 Whoever is granted that understanding
 Casts himself into an ocean of mysteries.
 When that understanding rises like revelation,
 Whatever he has to say will be correct.

Thus it is said that, as far as possible, a novice should act in accordance with the command of a spiritual guide. Although fasting during the month of Ramazan³² is enjoined, and the five daily prayers, yet a novice does not have the knowledge of those initiated into the secrets of religion and the realities of the Law. In the Law, for example, there comes a time when what is prescribed becomes prohibited while, on another occasion, something prohibited is enjoined. Surely you know that eating a dead body is forbidden, but there could be an occasion when it becomes lawful to do so. It is obligatory to fast in the month of Ramazan, but this observance could, on occasion, be prohibited. If someone is sure - i.e. he has a very good reason for thinking so - that, by fasting and not taking medicine he would perish, then he would be obliged to eat. Also, if there is a consensus among the physicians that, for a particular ailment, wine should be taken and, if this is not done, the person will die, then he is undoubtedly obliged to drink, on account of the consensus of the religious scholars. If he refused to drink and so died, he would have died a sinner. Thus the commands depend on the person, the circumstances, and the time. What does a simple novice know about all this, for knowing the secrets of religion and the realities of the Law is not his work. This knowledge is proper to the masters of insight and those well versed in the human heart, as has been said:

Food which is given to those pure souls
 Can never be offered to mere beginners.

Be careful not to raise any objection to whatever type of activity or repose you see in masters of the age and of the human heart. You should realize that it is all correct, and all meritorious. Moreover, if one's selfish soul asserts itself, and Satan makes some suggestion, then remember the story of the prophet Moses and Khwaja Khizr.³³ It is astonishing. One eats his fill and sleeps soundly, while the other fasts and does not sleep of a night. One contends with everybody, while the other flees from everybody. One wears old, worn-out garments, while the dress of the other could provide sustenance for many people. One remains silent, while the other, night and day, is engaged in converse. One conceals his condition, while the other makes a display of his. One serves one and all, whether he be of ill or of good repute, while the other will not even reply to anyone who has a bad reputation. One asks nothing from people, while the other does ask. One accepts what is freely offered, while the other rejects it. And so it is in all the other different kinds of actions. As long as one acts according to a master of hearts, everything is correct, meritorious and clear. This is where externalist scholars raise their voices and relate all this to madness. An answer to them would be the following:

Since you have never seen Solomon,
 What do you know about the speech of birds?³⁴

If done at the bidding of a master of the heart, then all these varying ways of behaving would be correct and meritorious. If he were to act as he pleases, however, it would all be faulty and sinful. Thus it has become clear that a guide is necessary for the Way, as has been said:

Whoever obtains collyrium from a guide's dust,
Whether he be pure or not, is distinguished.

If, at this point, someone asks: "How does a mere beginner know whether the person giving the commands is a master of the human heart and of the age, or a deceitful enemy?" say: "Here one has to return to oneself." The person set aside for him, a master of the human heart and of the age, will certainly be brought to him, or he will be borne to his door, in order to attain that wealth.³⁵ The saying, "Wealth does not bypass a capable person," applies here. Someone destined for adversity, however, will have a hundred bonds of adversity loaded upon him and he will, as it were, entangle himself in misery, so that both fall into the pit of adversity. "Everything is ready at hand for the purpose for which it has been created." This applies to both. If it is said: "Since grace is not cut off, where does this deprival of hope come from?" O brother, it is known that the sun, of its nature, sheds light and is bountiful. If a person remains hidden behind the obstructing wall of egoism, however, any disappointment would come from his side, not from any deprivation on the part of the sun. Such a person should find fault with his own disloyalty, as it is said:

Union is for the privileged. Alas, I am not among them!
As for me, gauge my disloyalty by looking at my work.

If someone says: "Both are equal as service, so where does this disparity come from?" say: "This proclamation was made on earth and in heaven and the door of 'why' and 'wherefore' was closed, for 'He does not ask questions. Why should He? He acts.'" Who is bold enough even to breathe?

Who is bold? The one who, out of fear of You,
Opens not his mouth except in homage to You.

When a scribe writes the letter 'j' on a piece of paper, and then 'd,' in no way can they become 'q' or 'k.'³⁶ If, according to the divine decree, one is created Abu Jahl, in no way can he become Abu Yazid.³⁷

A luckless fellow cannot untie the knot:
Exalted states cannot be the lot of one and all.
If the revolving heavens destined us for grief,
In no way can happiness be reaped.

At this point, it is not possible to say more. It is a deep ocean, inhabited by a hundred thousand crocodiles which drag down the traveller and seeker. Remember this, and listen to the injunction of Khwaja Alam and attain salvation. The theologians should say what is lawful and expound upon it, for they are enjoined to "speak to the people according to their power of comprehension." If you give bread and meat to a little baby, it will perish.

Food which is given to those pure souls,
Can never be offered to mere beginners.

Letter 2

IN QUEST OF KNOWLEDGE

Brother, Sheikh Umar, special greetings and prayers from the writer of these lines! Know that the command is, "Seek knowledge, even though it be in China," but matters have reached such a pass with the people of today that you would fancy the saying was, "Seek the world, even though it be in China!" If it is said to you in the world to come, "You had been told that the quest for knowledge was obligatory for you, so why did you not do so?" my reply would be that I do not know what has happened here, except, as you say, that concern for wife and children, eating and drinking, has not passed you by. If this excuse is accepted, it is a release for everyone. Relax! Wealth and goods are needed, as someone has correctly said:

For a dog, carrion counts as live prey:
For an ass, barley tastes like saffron.

O brother, since no work of the Law is possible, nor can it be at all profitable, without knowledge, and since there is no attaining the object of one's desire apart from deeds, the need to seek knowledge becomes obligatory.

Unless you disown customs and practices
You won't perceive the Path to happiness.
Perceiving the origin connects you to the Head:
Stressing form makes you a slave of the Law.

That knowledge, however, will not carry you to the gates of sultans and kings, or make you a Qazi³⁸ or an exponent of the Law.³⁹ I am speaking about knowledge of the life to come, and the Way to God, so that you may not fall into error, but preserve yourself from worldly theologians as from Satan.

All this knowledge is really truncated,
Quite different from that of the Way to God.
How can writing, which but darkens paper,
Turn a gloomy heart into a radiant moon?

A dervish⁴⁰ saw Satan sitting idle. He said to him: "O Accursed One, why are you idle?" He replied: "Worldly theologians have appeared on the scene: there is nothing left for me to do."

Realize that all actions can be classified into two categories. One comprises those actions which lead you towards God, such as all forms of devotion and worship; while the other consists of whatever leads you away from God, such as all sins. It is very important for all men to know about these two kinds of knowledge. With this knowledge, no matter how insignificant an action may be, it is extremely important in God's eyes. Without this knowledge, however, even if someone gives his life - which is the greatest of deeds - it is of little account in God's eyes, being like wind-borne dust.

**Knowledge makes fertile: action bears fruit:
Religion and wealth are in need of both.
Work without knowledge produces nothing:
An egg without a sperm remains sterile.**

This knowledge pertains to actions of the limbs. As far as possible, the heart should also be adorned with qualities of its own. These are of two kinds. One category of qualities leads closer to God Most Exalted. All qualities of this nature are praiseworthy, such as repentance, self-control, trust in God, pleasing Him and paying homage to Him, and so on. The other category of qualities leads far away from God and includes all blameworthy qualities, such as love of the world, possessions and rank; envy, jealousy and arrogance; avarice and others similar to these. It is most necessary to have a grasp of both these types for, without this knowledge, it is not at all possible to become a man of action, and there can be no attaining one's goal without action. This is the meaning of these lines:

**Hold your tongue, for His lovers
Do not choose to speak when in love.
Enter an idol-temple and be seated:
Tie a sacred thread upon your Sufi garb.**

Recite: "The one desirous of union with God performs good actions, and does not associate anything with God." Thus pious deeds, together with the absence of associating anything with God, constitute the condition for union. You know that it is impossible to have something conditioned apart from the condition. Similarly it is impossible to attain one's goal without action. Thus it is that all seekers throw dust upon their heads and lament over their difficult situation. If the abandonment of life, goods and children were the condition, the work would be easy.

**Lovers throw dust upon their heads:
Instead of dust, I shower down fire.**

You and I are caught up with, "What shall we eat" and "What shall we wear?" At any rate, "God has created some people for clothes, some for drink, and some for food." Manly people follow one path, while hermaphrodites follow another.

**Men in search of pearls return to the ocean:
Real men are wholly devoted to what lies above.
Filled with desire, they sail off in boats:
The ocean depths is where they search for pearls.**

Realize that this knowledge of the end of man is not attained apart from persevering service to the sheikhs of the Path and scholars of man's end - may God's favour be upon them all! In this age of ours they have become a philosopher's stone. What should you do? Let your welfare lie in this: all the letters I had transcribed and sent by the hand of Zainuddin, the son-in-law of Sheikh Kaka Zafarabadi, must have reached you, my dear friend.⁴¹ Each day, with complete attention and reflection, you should study one or two of them. If you can manage to be alone when you do so, this would be preferable. Recite this couplet:

If I cannot buy an ass-load of sugar,
Let me at least drive the flies from it!

"If rain does not fall, dew is sufficient." When the sun has set, what other option does a person have except to light a lamp?

If it is my ill-luck that the sun has set,
The Beloved's radiant face will be my lamp.

Giving oneself over to idleness and frivolity, and to eating and drinking just like animals, does not befit an intelligent and perceptive person, as it has been said:

Whoever does not experience this pain is not a man:
If you don't feel this pain, what remedy is needed?
Unbelief for the unbeliever, religion for the pious:
For Attar's⁴² heart, just a particle of Your pain!

O brother, these two works are the foundation of this Way. Consider a little and listen carefully, if you can. The first task is to keep your external members clean of the stain of sin. The second is to keep your heart unsullied by the stain of blameworthy qualities. When you have acquired this external and internal purity, the secrets of the angelic realm will be revealed to you, like a refreshing draught. Just as Abraham saw angels in heaven and on earth, so will you have drunk the sherbet and donned the robe of, "God is good and accepts only the good." The door of the tavern lies open. The need is to drink. Let him who has courage do so! The following has been well said:

You are thirsty, yet stay far from the ocean:
You are seated on a treasure, yet still begging?

Thus it is that people say:

The world is bathed in sunlight, but the beholders are blind:
The world is astir with news of Him, but the listeners are deaf.

If you are engaged in the work, it will one day be your good fortune to arrive where others have preceded you. You too will see what others have seen.⁴³ You too will say what they have already said:

The Beloved was manifest, but I knew it not:
He was right beside me, yet I knew it not.
I said, "Let me seek Him! Perhaps I shall find Him."
He himself was my distraction, yet I knew it not!

The sign of the perfection of steadfastness is when, no matter how much perfection a person may have, he is not filled thereby.⁴⁴ If this is not so, it is a clear sign that someone has not emerged from the constricting effect of his human nature and fallen headlong into the expanses of the heart.⁴⁵

If I had a cup to quaff a thousand oceans of wine,
Boldness would impel me to seek yet another cup.
My joy would know no bounds when,
Intoxicated, the Cupbearer drew me to his breast.

O brother, if at times you experience some need, take courage and strive by means of your own determination. You will thus discover the value of a man of firm resolve. It is firm resolve which carries you on from being an idol-worshipper to someone who worships God. As long as a seeker thinks he possesses something, his attention is still on himself. How can a self-centred person be a God-centred one, for he is still an idol-worshipper? Don't you see that when the renowned Righteous One⁴⁶ was full of life and had acquired mastery over himself, he said "O Apostle of God, what is faith?"

To say no way leads beyond what you have
Means, at bottom, that there is no God.

And:

What sort of shrine has a lock without a key,
Or ocean, whose depths are fathomless?
Every heart, seized by this quest, is intoxicated
And bereft of thought till Judgement Day.

Look at what spiritual boldness means: one day a person flings the lasso of seeking seventy times around the divine throne and, the very next day, he is content with two pieces of bread!

For a dog, carrion counts as live prey:
For an ass, barley tastes like saffron.⁴⁷

It is said that, when the Righteous One attained the perfection of mystical knowledge which is possible for man, his life was fulfilled. He knew, in reality, that what remained had no limits. For him, remaining alive or dying was one and the same. This is why our ancestors said: "Our religion is the same as that of old women and school-going children."

Each age this Way is found to be ever more unending:
With every hour people grow ever more astonished.
Whether it be the heavens, moon, sun or stars,
Each night and day heads grows more perplexed.

If someone were to say: "How can the faith of a perfect mystic be compared with that of an imitator," give this reply: "By way of example, one hundred is undoubtedly more than one but, in enumeration, there is no restriction." The 'hundred' designates the same kind of thing as the 'one' does. Finally, you must have heard that Khwaja Abu Yazid Bistami - the mercy of God be upon him - once said: "Glory be to me! How exalted is my dignity." When he came to die, his work attained perfection, and he said: "One day I said, 'Glory be to me! How exalted is my dignity.' Today, however, I cut the cord of the fire-worshipping Magi and say: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and apostle!'"

At times I experience plenty, at times I am in need:
At times my heart rejoices, at times it is distraught.
At times I am behind all creatures, at times I am in front:
I myself am the chameleon of the age.

Letter 3

RIGHT INTENTION

Brother, Sheikh Umar, prayerful greetings from the writer of these line Ahmad Yahya Maneri! You must know that the position of the Law is: "On the Day of Resurrection, men will be raised according to the purity of their intention." you overwhelmingly desire and seek God, you will be raised up among the lover and seekers of God. Their reward is: "Our Lord will shine forth radiantly." What room for heaven and hell exists here?

Here no trace is found of heaven or hell:
All your knowledge serves but to veil Me.⁴⁸

If your desire and quest is mainly for heaven, you will be counted among the virtuous, for whom the reward is: "Gardens of paradise descend." Ain ul-Quzat⁴⁹ says: "Here we have eating and drinking, and there we have eating and drinking. God forbid that simply by eating and drinking we are the same as brute beasts!" Behold the boldness of the intrepid!

A spiritless dog searches for bones:
A lion-cub pursues living marrow.

If your predominant passion is a desire and yearning for the world, you will be counted among the worldly. Their reward is: "And a gulf is set between them and what they desire" (Q34:54). Here, dust has to be thrown on your head, and you should grieve for yourself, and the same thing should be said as was uttered by a luckless one:

Where shall I seek medicine for this pain?
My life is almost over: what time remains to grieve?
I am a plaything of the age, no matter what I do:
No work attains completion, no matter what I do.

Look within yourself to see what you find there. Do love and affection for God predominate? Or love and affection for paradise? Or love and affection for the world? Realize that whatever predominates now has its significance explained in the following couplet:

Whatever captures your attention in this world
Will prove to be what you enjoy for all eternity.

This is the meaning of the one who said: "God does not look at your faces or your works: He looks at your hearts and your intentions." The impact of this news on the souls of the righteous is similar to that of hell on the souls of unbelievers and foolish people.

Until a man experiences this work,
What does he know about love and pain?
You know not this work, nor are you a lover:
You are dead! How are you fit to love?

O brother, asking questions about the state of the work takes its birth from you and me. If you are serious, correct your intention and desire, for a believer can do only one thing at a time. If he goes on pilgrimage to Mecca, he cannot keep trying to please his mother. If he refrains from going because he wants to please his mother, he simply cannot go on pilgrimage. The same applies to other works. By his intention he reaches out to all sorts of good deeds and acts of submission. The recompense for any good work performed by the believer has to be limited because the work is limited, while the recompense for a believer's good intention is unlimited, for there can be no limit to the intention of performing acts of submission and good deeds. "The good intention of a believer is better than his work." This would mean that, if someone has a good intention and desire but, for some reason, is unable to perform the work - as, for example, a sick person is unable to perform the pilgrimage; a weak man cannot go out to fight on the way of God; and a poor person cannot bestow alms - the reward and recompense would certainly be the same as that of the person who performs all these works.

It is related that the Messenger set out on an expedition against Tabuk during which the Muslims had to undergo many labours and trials. He said: "It is perfectly true that there are some people in Medina who have not seen this desert, nor have they defrayed any of the expenses involved, nor have they suffered any trial or sorrow on the way of God. Nevertheless, they are participating in all things along with us." People said: "O Apostle of God, how could this be? They are still in Medina." He replied: "There was an excuse for their remaining. They are accounted as present with us because of the perfection of their intention." From this it is proved that the work is of the heart, not of clay, and there is an enormous distance between clay and heart.⁵⁰ The abode of intention is the heart, not clay. Here one needs to be careful so that negligence finds no entrance. That is the meaning of the words:

From the door of the body to the Ka'ba of the heart,
There are, for lovers, over a thousand stages.
Along this Way, let your heart be your friend!
Make provision for thousands of stages.

O brother, the science of intention is exceedingly refined and subtle. Not everyone is capable of travelling along that road. Whatever a master of the heart does is in accordance with his intention, for the intention of each person is a measure of his faith. The faith of someone who follows others is rooted in imitation; that of the rationalist, in proof; while that of a mystic flows from personal experience. Look at the astonishing work of the renowned Righteous One! He left his wife and children behind in Mecca and migrated from Mecca together with the Chosen One. On the other hand, Khwaja Uwais Qarani⁵¹ did not leave his mother behind. When you examine their intention, both are correct.

There were a number of people from earlier generations who abandoned submission to God because they did not have a correct intention therein. Ibn Sirin⁵² did not recite the funeral prayer for Khwaja Hasan Basri.⁵³ He said: "This is not my intention." Thus it is that renowned men say that it is possible that his not saying the

prayers was better than their recital by others, as far as merit was concerned. What do you know about why people pray, or why they do not pray? What do you know about their motive for going on pilgrimage to Mecca, or for not going? Do you know why people fast or not? The heads of those addicted to habit and custom spin at this stage. Indubitably habit and custom are one thing, while the Way of the prophets and saints is something else.

How can you travel along this Way, O friend?
Can a spider keep pace with an elephant?

Nowadays everybody finds contentment in foolish ideas and feels satisfied with false opinions. If religion were as easy as people think it is, then prophets and saints would not have grown anxious, nor would brave men have become faint-hearted.⁵⁴

O brother, what do you know about the religion of men? Night and day pass your time being concerned about how you can perform humble service for them. This would be a worthwhile occupation. Dear brother, it has been said of Muhammad, the Apostle of God, "Undoubtedly you guide towards a straight path," while it is said of spiritual guides: "We have created among them a group which guides correctly." In other words, you can reach God in the shade of the sandals of the prophets, or in the humble service of Sufi masters. Whatever lies apart from this is a different kind of work.

If you have pain, a guide will appear:
A key will appear to assuage your pain.

Anyone whose strength lies elsewhere than in God Most Exalted should be careful. Even if a paradise filled with joys and blessings were his, know that he is far from the Way of real men. Do you know what that Way is?

Apart from union with You, let all be forbidden me:
Whatever I need, I have to seek from God.

And,

Paradise tomorrow, with the pious but without the Friend,
Would be worse than being in hell together with sinners.

In paradise one finds bread and water, beautiful damsels and imposing dwellings. It is well known that the whole world is in quest of these.

The garden of paradise is a fitting abode for ascetics,
While the upright find delight in innermost prisons.

High and low, good and bad have experienced His kindness:
Only the privileged, however, can advance towards His wrath.

Do you know what the paradise of real men is? "There is from God a paradise in which there are no beautiful damsels or imposing dwellings." If I you ask what it is, the answer is: "Our Lord will smile upon us." This is the meaning of:

Others are promised what will be tomorrow:
But for us payment has begun here itself.

You should know that the behaviour of the world is one thing, while that of lovers constitutes a different category. They do not have the strength to wait. They seek the Promised One here and now. Intoxicated with love they all say:

Either give me what I seek, or rid me of my desire:
Don't talk about tomorrow's promise! Do that or this.

Rabia of Basra⁵⁵ was asked why she did not wish for paradise. She said: "First the neighbour, then the house." Look at the firm resolve of this wearer of a skirt and grieve over your fine dress and turban-sash and know that, in reality, you are neither a man nor a woman. Simply ask, "What am I?"

On one occasion Imam Shibli⁵⁶ disappeared. His disciples went looking for him. They saw him in the garb of hermaphrodites and seated in their midst, looking just like one of them. They threw dust upon their heads and cried out: "O Leader of the Age, what is this all about?" He replied: "I saw that I could not be called a man, nor did I have the features of a woman. Thus I could not be anything else than a hermaphrodite. And what could be better for an hermaphrodite than to be among kindred folk?" Khwaja Attar says:

When a madman speaks with such artful boasting,
Don't blindly rush to do battle with him.
Keep your tongue far from his enticing words:
Hold excused a lover in his madness.
The Law is a burden for intelligent people,
But love comes to those not owning hearts.
Without doubt a madman, even if at fault,
Speaks heedlessly, no matter what he says.

In short, O brother, no action a man performs can be lacking intention and purpose. If he is interiorly filled with love of this world, his intention and purpose will be of this world and, in his actions, the same will apply. No matter how much he prays, fasts, goes on pilgrimage or gives alms, it will all be tinged with worldliness. On the other hand, if his inner disposition is that of a love for what lies in store for him, and that is the purpose and intention of his actions then, whether it be eating, drinking or sleeping, it will be related to the world to come. "From each vessel the contents will appear" is a well-known adage.

There is another group of people known for being royally audacious. Whatever they do is done purely for His sake. "My prayer, my worship, my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds" could be attributed to them. Their splendour is: "They seek His face," with their feet in this world and their heads in the next. They do not lower them until they hear from the Friend: "You are, in truth, My favourites." Someone has given a hint about this when he said:

For me another world exists besides this one:
Heaven and hell exist, but also another abode!

Glory be to God! What men these are! Whatever anyone says or writes about them would be a drop in the ocean. For you and me, and the likes of us, the only legacy we have is what can be written and read. What is to be done?

Love is something that happens, not anything taught.

It has been said: "Love does not come from the instruction of creatures but from that of the Creator." A letter can contain no more than this: "Knowledge is obtained from the mouths of men." Peace!

Letter 4

THE DESCENT OF TRIALS AND BEARING BURDENS

Dear brother, Sheikh Umar, special prayers and greetings from Sharaf Maneri! "Say: 'Peace be to him! Undoubtedly God tests a believer with trials, just as one of you tests gold in the fire,' is a special saying." The divine instruction consists in this: God will test a believer with trials so that the genuinely upright man might be distinguished from the false one - just as gold is tested in fire - so that the heart's secret may be made manifest. Do you know what this is? Every time a servant says, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God," he claims to be His friend. There must be some proof of this, for a claim made without adducing proof is not to be heeded. We have heard that "the prophets first suffered trials and then the saints." This is what a lover is. It is impossible for the sun to rest.

If the Friend sends me trials it may be
That He himself is for the sake of trials.

A man said: "O Apostle of God, I do love God." He replied: "Get ready for trials!" This is a hint about seeking. He spoke of proof because, without proof and demonstration, people will not advance. It has been put thus:

If You hit me hard, I can only sigh with happiness.

All things find repose in comfort and are sorely put out by trials. Love is quite different, for love feeds on trials.

Give sweets to the person who has not tasted love.

What can be said of sweets is one thing, but speaking of love and affection is something quite different.

I can relate two hundred thousand stories
About those killed by love upon His threshold.
Along His road a thousand lovers
Are swinging from their gibbets!

What room is there here for speaking about sweets? One day, Harisa appeared before Muhammad, who asked him how he had passed the morning. He replied that he had spent it as a genuine believer. He asked what proof he had to buttress his claim, for "there is a reality corresponding to every truth. How can you establish the reality of your faith?" Harisa adduced the following argument as proof. "My soul has understood the world. I have spent the night in vigil and the day in fasting. The world's silver, gold, mud and stone are, for me, all the same. It is as though I had a clear vision of the divine throne." At the end of the narration, since he adduced this proof for his claim, Muhammad knew that he was righteous. He said: "You have attained rectitude of behaviour. Be strong and persevering in this faith of

yours!" It is clear that a claim by itself, without proof and argument, will not pass muster, so that a man of probity can be distinguished from a liar.

When the accursed Nimrod⁵⁷ had the prophet Abraham placed in a raw hide to be thrown into the fire, he said: "God suffices for me." When he was placed in the catapult and hurled towards the fire then, while he was still in the air, Gabriel arrived and said: "Is there anything you need?" He replied: "Nothing from you." Gabriel answered: "Ask your Lord." He said: "God suffices for me. I ask for full knowledge of Him." This was the proof needed to demonstrate his claim, "God suffices for me." Hence the saying: "Making a claim is so very easy, but it is extremely difficult to produce the proof needed to verify it."

In *Zad ul-Arwah* (Provisions for Souls) by Wahhab bin Mimba⁵⁸ it is mentioned that he said: "In the books of ancients I have read that Moses saw Satan and said to him: 'What would have happened if you had prostrated?' He replied: 'I would be making a false claim, just like your claiming to love when it was said to you, 'Look towards the mountain!' I have accepted torment and curses rather than prostrate before any other than God, so that there might be no falsity in my claim.'"

O Sa'di, you cannot compel anyone to stop loving!
If ejected from the house, I shall sit by the door.⁵⁹

The secret contained in trials is this. When a person is at ease with blessings yet flees from trials and finds repose in anything except God, he is fleeing from the Friend. When he is content with trials, however, he has attained the Friend. Thus blessings are to be driven from one's door, while afflictions are to be welcomed. In this sense rejection is better than acceptance.

Every trial bestowed by God upon this people
Has, hidden within it, a munificent treasure.
If you wish to delight in Him forever,
Traverse the entire vale of His wrath.
Until you experience this, you won't experience that:
Without trials or pain, you would not need a remedy.

Even without asking, Pharaoh was granted four hundred years of lordship and comfort. If he had requested a particle of the pain, burning and hunger of the prophet Moses, it would not have been granted him.

O friend, We have not given Pharaoh any headache,
Because he did not know the secret of Our pain.

One day, while engaged in intimate converse with God, Imam Shibli said: "O Lord, how long will You keep on killing your friends?" He replied: "Until they receive their recompense." He inquired: "O God, what is this recompense of theirs?" He answered: "My beauty and union with Me are encountered in 'I am the One who killed him, and I am his recompense.'"

You kill lovers who have no sin or fault:
At least honour them with a visit to their grave!
The sending of trials upon a devotee is proof of his friendship with God.
How can I bear His burden if I have no patience?

It is impossible for a lover to be content without the beloved. What other recourse is there except that of bearing the burden?

Pain from you has become a balm for me:
 Dust from you has become precious for me.
 Your abuse, O beautiful moon-faced one,
 Has become, in fact, a restorative for me.
 For your sake I offer up my life:
 When I see you I feel content.

Once a dervish said: "Anyone who does not bear His blows patiently is not truly in love." A mystic spoke up and said: "On the contrary, O poor one, anyone who does not enjoy His blows is not truly in love."

He was about to kill me, yet I was all excited:
 How good the striking of His sword would be!

A lover is intoxicated by the beauty of the Beloved. He is beside himself, finding his being in Him. At this stage, what can pain do? Trials would be something to relish.

The devotee remained seated in his cell,
 Because he had no inkling of Your beauty!

It is reported that, one day, when no trial befell Rabia of Basra, she prayed thus: "O God, You have given me bread but where is the food stuck to the bottom of the pot?"

I am granted life to bear the burden of Your love:
 Until Your work is accomplished, I shall not flee.

O you turbaned and well-dressed one, keep in view the strength needed to don this garb! In this affair, it is effort that counts, not face or form.

There are many in the city who seek Me:
 Lamentation is the work of all who seek Me.
 There are thousands of gibbets at My door:
 Day and night those seeking Me have to suffer.

It is said that the Apostle was given the choice between wealth and poverty. Since he was a lover, he chose poverty, for poverty is the abode of misfortune. The Beloved says:

If you seek Me, deliver your body to be ravished,
 Like those madly in love, throw your head to the world!
 Fill your heart with grief, and throw it to the onlookers:
 Like those bereft of sight, put your life at risk.

He made this prayer: "O God, make me live poorly; die in poverty; and be raised up among the poor, for it is better for me to be with You, hungry and naked, than to be enjoying wealth and royalty, but without You." This has been expressed thus:

O seeker, since honour is undoubtedly His due
 In neither world expect nothing but contempt.
 When you see His beauty attached to a gibbet,
 Realize that His love always involves a gibbet.

Since neither Pharaoh, nor Nimrod, nor Qarun⁶⁰ had been bequeathed even a particle from the world of love, all of them were granted dominion, wealth and worldly prestige so that people might realize that God's dealings with His friends and lovers are of one kind but, with His enemies, of a different kind.

O you acquainted with the lane of love, be patient:
 The injustice of good people is wholly for their friends.

The Apostle has said that the order given to the Friend of God,⁶¹ "Sacrifice your son!" would not have been a trial, nor the sawing in two of the prophet Zakaria.⁶² No, it would be a misfortune and trial only if it were poured over our heads, as it was once said: "If it were not for you, I would not have created the heavens. Everything is for your sake."⁶³ Once it was said: "There is nothing in this matter which pertains to you." Once an oath was sworn to me, "Upon your life!" Once this scourge was wielded: "Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter" (Q93:6)? Once the divine throne was made my resting place. Once, for the sake of a measure of barley, I was borne to the door of a Jew. Once it was said: "We have borne your supplication aloft for you." Once a camel's intestines were flung around my neck. "No other prophet had as many troubles as I did." It can be summed up as follows:

I either have handfuls of silver, or play the dervish:
 My heart is either filled with joy, or dejected.
 I am either neglected by all, or noticed by all:
 I myself am the chameleon of the age.

It is said that the first word inscribed on the preserved tablet⁶⁴ was the word 'love.' If you change the dot of 'b' to that of 'n,' it becomes 'effort.' The written form remains the same. Only the dot differs. If you look carefully, you will find that both are the same. Thus it is that a sage has said that a hundred thousand ills have been hidden in each dot and, in each letter, a hundred thousand poisonous sherbets are commingled. In every age His friends want to become mere nobodies. All of these are addressed as follows: "Be patient, resigned and close to God. Fear Him, so that you might attain salvation."

My beloved has left my heart hanging by her tresses,
 And my heart and soul are filled with love's sorrow.
 As long as this disturbance arises in my heart
 Tears of blood are shed Because of my plight.

LETTERS THE WORLD

My brother, Sheikh Umar, special greetings and prayers from the writer of these words, Sharaf Maneri! May the words of the Apostle, "The world and all its

contains is accursed,"⁶⁵ be confirmed in a special way for you! Now realize that everything in the world is of three kinds. One is whatever in appearance and reality is worldly so that intending and desiring it can in no way be God-oriented, e.g. all sins. It is also said that this category includes the enjoyment of an abundance of lawful things. For this reason, although it is lawful, nevertheless such an abundance fills and satisfies one's selfish soul, just as all sins do. There is also a second kind which, although it seems to be directed towards God yet, because a correct intention and purpose is lacking, is actually worldly in intent and purpose, such as abandoning one's carnal appetites in order to be regarded as an ascetic; or seeking knowledge for the sake of human esteem and in order to be in a position to acquire worldly goods; and similar things. They are all accursed, even though they seem to be godly in appearance. In this situation it is safer not to undertake such things.

Abandon the world in order to become a king:
 Otherwise your head will spin in perplexity.
 Whatever does not emerge with you from dust
 Would smack of the world, not pure religion.

The third kind appears to be worldly but, because a person's intention and purpose is directed towards God, is not blameworthy. Examples of this are eating, drinking and sleeping so as to have strength for worship; seeking a woman lest one fall into what is forbidden as well as to have a son who might proclaim, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God" and thus His house of worship might be filled; and possessing a modicum of goods so that he might thereby have leisure for divine service and worship and not be dependent on others.

If you have a little bread and something to wear,
 Then every hair of your head would be a king.

It is clear that whatever fills and satisfies one's selfish soul here and now is of no use for what pertains to the end of man, because it is all worldly and harmful to religion.

You have troubled your soul for bread:
 You have flung faith beneath your feet.

Whatever is needed for the end of man, and by intending it his ultimate end is served, is not worldly, no matter how much it might seem to be so, e.g. provisions, a saddle-camel, fodder and pack animals for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Religious scholars have divided the world into three categories. The first is that of necessity with regard to food, clothing and a place to stay; the second refers to what is needful; while the third pertains to what is superfluous to one's real needs, being concerned with self-embellishment, boasting and seeking superiority over others. This has no end, just as the fire of hell has no end. Here salvation and security lie in abandonment.

Abandon the world for the sake of your faith:
 Give that away so that this may become yours.

If your heart becomes conscious of what this means,
Abandoning worldliness has become your religion.

Whoever has retrenched to what is necessary has restricted increase and search to the measure of necessity. Whoever has settled for what is needful is not out of danger, while anyone who has fallen into embellishment and adornment, and taken to boasting and seeking to be superior, is said to have fallen into hell fire, which has no end.

Whoever is anxious about acquiring more
Has unbelief and poverty as fellow travellers.
The first obstruction on man's path
Is the reed of the gullet and drum of the belly.

Thus it is that the sages have cut back to what is necessary. The leader and trail-blazer in this matter was Khwaja Uwais Qarani, who was so vexed by worldly activities that people thought he was mad. A year went by and then another during which nobody saw him. His food consisted of date-seeds which he picked up off the road. He wore patched garments which he gathered from rubbish-heaps. Moreover, those who recognized the world and saw its deception have lived in a similar fashion. This has been the path of prophets and saints.

What if someone outshines the splendour of several Solomons
So as to gain possession of earth and the heavenly throne?
Let your dwelling be but what He has appointed,
And your food whatever comes from basket weaving.

If people have not reached this stage they should, at least, be content with nothing less than cutting down to what is necessary so that their hearts might be at peace.

What help can you expect from the world or creatures,
A rubbish-heap filled with dogs and carcasses?

In the words of Sufi masters: "Entrust your heart to God! If you do not occupy your heart with God it will certainly be filled with the grief and sorrow of the world, and every heart that has become preoccupied with what is other than God has been separated from God."

Whoever lives a life of habit
Is not in touch with reality.
Yet, until you journey within yourself,
This insight will never be granted you.

Nobody who is occupied with wife, children, eating and drinking can become engrossed in what is interior, for his heart is spoiled, and a spoiled heart cannot become caught up with what is interior. God has said: "Whoever is averse to remembering Me in a proper and fitting manner is shackled by sensuality." What does it mean to be "shackled by sensuality?" It means that a person's heart is continually plagued by the grief and sorrows of the world. When his heart becomes the abode of worldly grief and sorrows, it becomes a home for demons.

The heart of a person reveals the face of God:
How can you call a demon's abode a 'heart'?

Shunning God is said to be of two kinds. One is the abandonment of the religious practices and duties which should be performed. The second is when a person is physically present but his heart is not. Since his heart is not present you can say he has abandoned God.

For the intelligent it is as clear as the day:
Night and day, misfortune awaits the heedless.

O brother, in all of this it has been fixed that some individuals have not been created for eating and drinking, indulging in pleasure and lustful pursuits. "I have not created *jinn*⁶⁶ and men for anything except praise." The secret is contained in the following words.

Man is not meant to be without grief:
None except man has feet in the mud.
Rejoicing is foreign to those who seek refuge in Him:
Man experiences grief from his very own home.

When a dervish has something, let him eat. If he has nothing, let him borrow something. Otherwise how will he remain a dervish?

When you eat a lot, you become an elephant:
If you don't eat much, you become a Gabriel.
Eat little so that you may live long:
Eating one's fill makes a person quickly hungry.

It is said that if a dervish fasts then, that very night, he will be lifted up to God. The work peculiar to a dervish is to fast and go hungry. No one who eats his fill can walk the path of religion. It is said that if Pharaoh had been hungry there is no way he would have laid claim to divinity. That calamity occurred because he was well fed. Thus it is said that, if a well-fed person comes to pray, Satan draws him to one side, whereas he flees from a hungry man who may have fallen asleep. Going hungry is praised in the seventy-two sects of Islam as well as in the seven hundred sects of unbelievers, while eating to satiety is not acceptable. Sensuality is like timber, and hunger, fire. The fire of hunger consumes all lust. It is said that hunger is like a cloud which rains down nothing but mercy, while satiety is a calamity and a disaster leading nowhere except to unbelief and sin.

When a contented person begs,
In reality he is acting like a king.
A friend is always hungering after that,
So that his soul might be fully satisfied.

It once happened that no smoke arose from the dwelling of the noblest and most outstanding man of creation⁶⁷ for a period of one month. A year went by and, till the fourteenth night of that month, the light of the lamp gave no light. In this state he said:

Each grief which comes from You, O Life, to my heart,
Is really precious, like a kindness to my heart.
Don't imagine my grief contains no draught of joy:
Any pain that He brings cannot crush my heart.

Letter 6

DISCIPLESHIP AND STRUGGLE WITH SELF

Sheikh Umar, special greetings and prayers! O brother, a disciple is one who entrusts himself to a spiritual guide, for "real desire means abandoning all desires." This happens when someone emerges from self-interest like a snake emerging from its skin, or becomes like a corpse in the hands of a washer of corpses. If there is the least sign of opposition remaining within him, or if any place be found within him for questions like 'how' or 'why,' then he would be a worshipper of self, not a disciple devoted to his guide. In other words, it is said that a disciple should worship his guide so that he can become a worshipper of God. "Whoever obeys the Apostle obeys God," has this meaning. "My companions are like stars: whoever follows their guidance is on the right path" also points to this. A sign of worshipping one's guide would be when you can play with your faith.⁶⁸ Do you know what "to play with your faith" means? If someone's guide orders him to do something which is against his religious belief, he will not say, "This is against the faith: how can I do it?" His confidence in him should be such it becomes like "a tablet descended for him,"⁶⁹ otherwise a disciple would be doing what he wants, not what his guide wants him to do.

He is your guide, don't look for the Way:
 He is your tongue, don't prattle vainly.
 Consider his every saying a profound secret,
 And his every deed as divinely guided.
 Submit entirely to him and become a king:
 Become wholly his and do whatever you wish.

What can you tell infants at the breast about the work of men? What prohibition can you make? How can you reveal the secrets of the faith and the inner truths of the Law to an immature child? What will happen to a sick man if he tells the physician that he will take one medicine but not another? A person who attends formal prayer should stand behind the prayer leader. If he steps in front of him you know what would happen.

There can be many diseases for which a physician makes use of poison, which is a destructive substance. A sickness which is not cured by a normal medicine may be treated by means of a medicine which is forbidden but, because of necessity, becomes lawful. What if there is no other remedy for a person suffering from emaciating hunger except to eat a carcass, which is unlawful? A physician prescribes medicine according to the need of the patient. Some need something bitter, others need something sweet. If he gives something sweet to a person who needs a bitter medicine he will harm his patient, and vice versa. He would not be a physician but an ignoramus.

You need the Sun's light of wisdom
 To discern the texture of the heart's desires.

The prophets are like physicians, and people like those who are sick, while the Quran resembles a store of medicines spread out on a cloth. "What We cause

to descend from Our Quran is a healing." A particular medicine is prescribed for each patient and, for each disease, a special concoction is prepared so that each sick person may be restored to health, be preserved from perishing and see the beauty of the faith.

Any desire which occurs before this
Would be custom and habit, not religion.

It is like the group which has an inheritance - the prophets! They have been commanded to speak in accordance with each person's intellectual capacity and, in accordance with the seriousness of each person's disease, to prescribe some medicine.

The guide has come like a philosopher's stone:
His breast has become a dark green ocean.

Thus every power he employs is exercised with a firm belief that "this is a tablet which has descended." If there is the slightest trace of 'how' or 'why' remaining within you, you would be a renegade, not a disciple.

It is related that a disciple said to his guide: "Last night I dreamt that you said something to me and I asked 'Why?' The guide immediately turned his face away from him⁷⁰ and said: 'If you gave no thought to 'why' while you were awake, then it would not have cropped up in your dream."

O brother, in the sight of real men all people are children at the breast. Rather, they are still in their mothers' wombs, or even in the loins of their fathers, or yet in the world of nothingness. You and I should be considered as proud liars enmeshed in worship of self. Speaking about spiritual discipleship would be loss and disappointment until the father of death raises the curtain from in front of us and a voice sounds forth: "I have removed your veil. Today your eyes see clearly." It will become clear whether you and I are men of faith bound with the thread of belief in One God or that of polytheism; are turbanned in an idol-temple, or a mosque.

When the dust settles, then it will be clear
Whether you are astride a horse or an ass.

At this stage we should throw dust on our heads and bewail our lot and recite this couplet which expresses our plight:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.⁷¹

In other words, nobody can glance at the eternal command and divine will and learn what has been decreed. Moreover, all these things which are happening are in accordance with a person's mystical state, not in the realm of beliefs, in order that nobody may speak foolishly here. A person dear to God has said:

If you are drawn one day to this field
You will see the sum paid for real men.
In this manner you will see and understand
A hundred thousand meanings, and be confirmed.

Nevertheless, as long as a person is not granted a share in the wealth of this group, foolish talk will take place. Peace!

Letter 7

FIRM RESOLVE⁷²

Dear brother, Sheikh Umar, special greetings and prayers from Sharaf Maneri!

O brother, according to a tradition men are of three kinds. One kind resembles brute beasts. They are interested in eating, drinking, sleeping and sexual indulgence. "They are like beasts who have wandered from the path" describes them. Others are like angels. They are preoccupied with praising, glorifying, honouring and worshipping God. Their qualities are those of angels. Still others resemble messengers. They are intent on loving and yearning for their Lord. Their qualities are those of prophets. This is what is meant by the saying: "A man's worth can be gauged from his strength of purpose."

The Lord will call it 'resolution' if you are granted Adam's choicest virtue; Abraham's friendship with God; Moses' converse with God; and Jesus' spiritual depth.⁷³ Unless your head is lowered, you can never become a Sufi. This is why this group calls "royally audacious" him of whom it has been written: "The Lord has placed in the hands of men a bow which neither Gabriel nor Michael was able to string." That bow is this very strength of purpose.

Do you know what this means? They have understood the real state of affairs. All poverty embraced for God's sake is genuine wealth, while all wealth without God is poverty. The wealth which accrues to a person as a grace connected to poverty comes from finding the Bestower, not from the acquisition of gifts.

Why should I go to the Ka'ba and bear desert afflictions?
It is the Beloved's lane: its direction, the face of the Friend.

The sign of a man of firm resolve is that he pays no attention to what he has achieved or attained. Rather, he is concerned with what he does not have. It is possible for the mind of a mean-spirited fellow to be satisfied with what he has already acquired. A man of resolve is forbidden to rest content. It is said that, as long as a seeker's attention is on what he possesses, he is an idol-worshipper.

What did the esteemed Righteous One say as a mature resolute man? "O Apostle of God, what is faith?" Glory be to God! Even though "after the prophets the Righteous Abu Bakr was the most excellent of creatures," and notwithstanding that he was blessed with "if weighed against the faith of the community, Abu Bakr's faith would weigh more," nevertheless he asked: "What is faith?" What firm resolve, and what poverty!

I don't seek knowledge, asceticism or ecstasy:
I simply tread all paths in hope.

Thus it is said that, since the world began, neither such a disciple nor such a guide has ever been seen. When the guide asks, "What is 'swerving from what is seen,' and what is 'losing the way?'" his disciple, possessing that perfection, comes along and asks: "What is faith?" Just see the firm resolve of the disciple, and the magnanimity of his guide! O brother, how can this world or the next satisfy those conspicuous for their firm resolve?

I seek your lips: of what use to me is sugar?

The great Moses, in all his eminence, prayed thus: "O God, where should I seek You?" The reply came: "Where you find a broken heart which is terrified about its own salvation." He said: "O God, no heart is more broken or terrified than mine." The reply came: "Then I am where you are so that you might realize that 'the heart is the throne of God.'" What does this mean? No matter how much knowledge, dedication and witness there may be, still "the more broken, the more valuable." The more broken the heart of a believer, the more his value exceeds that of both worlds. "I am with those broken in spirit. Their hearts are resplendent."

The most astonishing work is that the Prince of prophets and saints used to beg forgiveness seventy times each day. When this verse came, "Beg forgiveness for your sin" (Q.40:55 & 47:19) he increased it from seventy times to a hundred.

It happened to an utterly obedient one, the most excellent of all creatures after the prophets that, in spite of this wealth, "If the faith of Abu Bakr were to be weighed against that of my people, his would weigh more," he said: "O Apostle of God teach me a prayer which I could recite after the obligatory ritual prayer." He replied: "Say: 'O Lord, I have done myself grievous harm etc.'"⁷⁴

When that learned member of the community, Aisha,⁷⁵ the Mother of the Faithful, said: "O Apostle of God, if I perceive it is the Night of Power⁷⁶, what should I do?" he replied: "Say: 'O my God, You are a forgiver of sins and delight in forgiving. Forgive me, O Forgiving One, O Merciful One.'" From this we have an indication that, no matter how submissive and pure someone may be, from one hour to the next he should not be free of repenting and seeking forgiveness, for man's destruction is found in the abandonment of repenting and seeking forgiveness, not by sin alone.

Consider the story of Adam and that of the Devil. After Adam fell he got up and said: "My Lord, I have done myself grievous harm." That cursed one, however, remained where he fell so that he could be branded with: "May there be a curse upon you until the Day of Judgement!"

O brother, a person should not sin, but if he does fall, he should get up quickly, just as our father did, and say the same thing: "My Lord, I have done myself grievous harm." One should not remain obstinate in one's fall, as Cain did, for that opens the way to infidelity. Ultimately he became an unbeliever, the first man to do so. May God protect us from it!

O brother, the pure and submissive ones have no rest from tyranny and wrath, so how can you and I, with our infidel souls being held captive by Satan, expect peace?

Neither Gabriel nor Michael knows what He is about, so how can you and I and the likes of us know? It is related that, when the Devil fell, Gabriel and Michael wept for some time. A voice came: "What is the matter with you that you are weeping so profusely? He himself knows what is happening." They said: "O Lord, we cannot be saved from Your deception." A reply came: "You should both be wise! Don't feel safe from My deception!" Behold the One who has no need!

I don't know what got You going in the past,
Nor do I know who has read about Your end.

O brother, the perfection and beauty of none is due to his faith and devotion, nor is it the unbelief and sin of anyone that leads to his harm and destruction. They say that unbelief and faith are both of the same colour. What difference would it make if the entire world became a Ka'ba, and all jinn and men became an Abu Bakr or Umar Khattab,⁷⁷ or if the entire world became an idol-temple and all jinn and men became a Nimrod or Pharaoh?

What is unbelief or faith before His self-sufficiency?
What is doubt or certainty compared to His integrity?
At His door, how does a Magian differ from a Muslim?
At His door, what is a fire-temple or a hermitage?
You gain no profit from Jesus or Moses,
Nor does Pharaoh or Nimrod cause You loss.

Here, however, the topic is sin. O brother, it is known that whoever is raised up is taken up from the path of devotion, while everyone who is thrown down is hurled from the path of disobedience and sin. Thus it is that holy men do not neglect a single aspect of devotion, no matter how insignificant it may be. It is also necessary to make an effort to please God, and not commit sin, no matter how trivial it may seem. One needs to take this matter very seriously.

Assemble at God's door: don't rely on strength.
Become a man of lamentation on this road.

Thus it is necessary to have nothing to do with sin but, if one falls, it is necessary to get up quickly and say: "My Lord, I have done myself grievous harm." A person should shun obstinacy in committing sin as he would shun unbelief, for all destruction is rooted in this obstinacy. "There is no light matter where obstinacy is concerned, nor grave where there is repentance," is a decision of the Law.

It can now be hoped that, having become aware of the contents of this letter, the mention of miracles, states, stages and vicious thoughts, since all proceed from passion and ambition, might be put to one side. Night and day, just like sinners, cry out with lamentation and grief: "O Lord, I have done myself grievous harm. Forgive me, for there is no other who can forgive me except You."

Khwaja Bayazid said: "For thirty years I said, 'O God, do this' or 'do that.' When I reached the first stage of mystical knowledge I said: 'O God, be mine, and do whatever You wish.'" All who feel the need of something from the Friend should ask Him, but what should those who seek Him ask from Him? Just look at royal resolve, coupled with holiness and purity, attaining the stage of "but they are respected devotees." Moreover, "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54) has become applicable to water and dust so that you might know that, no matter what belongs to a person, it is dust and water that possesses it.

When dust became engrossed in His purity,
The divine throne descended in front of Adam's dust.

And,

A base-spirited dog seeks eagerly for bones:
The tiger's claw strikes out for living marrow.

How can an ant possibly have the capacity of an elephant? Superficial people are preoccupied with external matters. What is obligatory for Majnun⁷⁸ is not so for anybody who does not love Laila. Sayings of manly people have currency, not stories of hermaphrodites, so that here no one may act extravagantly. The person wounded by the sword is different from the one who wields it. It is one thing to lick a saucer, and another thing to eat sweets. Do not estimate the manly ones as less than yourself in the scales of the intellect. They are beyond your weighing them in such a scale, for their steadfast resolution is superior to everything else.

Since value and rank depend upon steadfast resolve, inevitably there will be distinctions of rank. "All the people had an ordinary glory but that of Abu Bakr was special." Do you know where Abu Bakr's special lustre on the Day of Resurrection will come from? It will be because the draught that reached him from his guide was special. It was nothing other than, "What is biased vision, and what is rebellion?" See the courage that can stride from the deepest depths to the most exalted heights. What does it mean? "God is pleased with lofty works but not with what is trite." The more exalted a person's resolve, the more sublime is his work.

What do you see on the constricted face of man? See what comes from his Friend. If you see whatever is found in heaven and on earth, then the image of all that is reflected on a person's face. Also, the image of whatever has been created on tablet or by pen, in paradise or hell, is present within man. The image of whatever is found in the world of divinity is impressed on a person's spirit. There is a hint of all this in the words: "Don't you see within yourselves?" "He knew himself and thus knew his Lord" comes from here.

Those endowed with perception say that the way to God, the Honour'd Glorious One, lies neither in heaven nor on earth, nor even in paradise or the divine throne. Rather, the way to God Most Exalted lies within you, for the throne of God bears witness to the heart of a believer.

O you who forever roam around the world,
Tell me, how has this wandering profited you?

Whoever masters his heart achieves his purpose, while whoever misreads the way of the heart gets lost and fails to achieve it.

Your dust has been mixed with affliction:
Many treasures crown the head of this dust.

Don't remain empty-handed! Knock at a door, for "God may perhaps give some order concerning it."

Time and again draw a circle round about me:
Happily You might slip in like a stranger.

Why are you concerned about strangers? Come as far forward as you can!
What do they know? "The person who knocks at the door hopes that it will be

opened for him" gives much consolation to seekers. If it is so ordained it will be opened but, if not, what remedy remains for a person who is disloyal from birth?

What danger is there for the heart, or strength for the soul?

And:

It is better to die at His door than live at any other's.

Don't turn back! If the compensation for someone killed by a man is gold and silver coins then, when He kills, the recompense is vision. "I have killed him and I am his recompense." If you had a thousand lives to give in thanksgiving it would not be enough.

On the day your heart grieves to the point of death

A thousand lives can be offered in recompense.

Letter 8

REPENTING AND TURNING BACK TO THE LORD MOST EXALTED

My dear dervish, Sheikh Umar, special greetings from Sharaf Maneri!

O brother, it is the work of angels to remain untainted by sin from their very creation till their end; of Satan to be stained with sin from his creation to his end; and of Adam and his descendants to commit sin and also to repent.

O inveterate sinner, repentance leads to openness:

Many kinds of blessings have been prepared for you.

Hasten to repentance as to Mother Fortune:

By delaying, many things come to pass.

A man is not seized if he commits a single sin. He is taken hold of only if he abandons repentance. Don't you see that there is a consensus that, if a person sins and then repents, he is not taken to task. "When someone repents it is as though he had not sinned." His composition is a mixture of desires and lust, while Satan is lurking at his heel, not to mention the infidel soul inside his shirt.

O that my mother had never given birth,

And my infidel soul had not slain me!

So, repentance for him is something precious. There is nobody from Adam's children who does not sin, but the best among sinners are those who repent after having sinned. Even though prophets are under the protection of sinlessness,⁷⁹ they are not free from indeliberate faults.⁸⁰ To that extent they are sinful.⁸¹ Similarly, although saints are protected and preserved, they are not free from venial sin,⁸² and might possibly commit serious sins.⁸³ O brother, even though the stage was that of paradise and a servant such as Adam, the Protected One, had had the crown of sinlessness placed upon his head and the robe of vicegerency placed upon his body, together with a thousand miracles and comforts, and had heard the single command, "Don't go near this tree lest you be numbered among the oppressors," he still could not place his foot down securely. Undoubtedly he fell. In such a situation as today's

world, filled with thousands of commands and prohibitions to be heeded, and with one's selfish soul to contend with, as well as having Satan at his heels, how can someone not sin or slip? "This is an extraordinary situation." Adam fell in such a place - poor man!

You cannot flee from upheavals and calamity
Even if, like a bird, you had a thousand wings.

Man has two states: having and being passed by. When in the former, he experiences sinlessness. His every action is one of acceptance and submission. "This is the grace of God." When he is passed by, nothing proceeds from him except opposition and sinful disobedience. "This is justice from Him." What can be done here? This is said: "I seek protection in You from You" - a cry from You to You!

Since I remain beneath You, I become a suppliant:
What I receive from Your hand I entrust to Your hand.

When one is bound, hand and foot, and cast into the sea and told, "Don't get wet," this is difficult indeed! May the mercy of God be on the soul of Iraqi⁸⁴ who said:

O that you were not, O Iraqi,
For all strife stems from you.

At this stage all men of insight are desirous of being dissolved but do not achieve their desire. A mystic was asked: "What do you desire?" He replied: "Nothingness, for that has no existence." One day the messenger Adam saw the Devil and said: "O accursed one, what is this you have done to me?" He replied: "O Adam, who did to me what I did to you?" It has been well put thus:

The Eternal Fowler who placed the grain in the snare
Caught a bird, and gave its name as 'Adam.'
All good or evil which occurs in the world
He himself does, yet pretends people have done it.

Why speak of Satan or the selfish soul? "God does whatever He wants." Nevertheless, unless the ball is in front of the polo player, what can destiny do to advance the play? It is completely like this, but you can choose to allow suspicions to arise. Be alert lest you be deceived!

O brother, when the Apostle, in spite of glory and sinlessness, experienced also a hundred fears and terrors, he said: "O Converter of hearts, let my heart rest in Your religion," it can be understood what has happened to you and me. If the sacred thread is tied around you, what can you do to prevent it? And if you are borne from a mosque to an idol-temple, what can you do to stop yourself? Look at the Devil, who was the teacher of the angels!

After completing a hundred thousand years of devotion
The collar of a curse was placed around his neck.

And look at what happened to Balaam, son of Beor, a learned and ascetical man, endowed with a hundred miracles!

Thus it is that remaining pure from the first moment of his creation till the last pertains to angels, but falling yet rising again pertains to man. A sage has said that

man can bear the grief of both worlds but does not have the strength to be a Muslim for a single day.

The most astonishing work is that the King of prophets and saints used to beg forgiveness seventy times each day, and when this verse came, "Beg forgiveness for you sin" (Q40:55; 47:19), he increased it from seventy times to a hundred.

The following happened to an utterly obedient one, the most excellent of all creatures after the prophets and, in spite of this wealth, "If the faith of Abu Bakr were to be weighed against that of my people, his would weigh more." One day he said: "O Apostle of God teach me a prayer which I could recite after the obligatory ritual prayer." He replied: "Say: 'O Lord, I have done myself grievous harm. Forgive me, for there is no other who can forgive me except You.'"

Assemble at God's door: don't stay far off:
Become a man of lamentation on this road.

Letter 9

A LOWLY OPINION⁸⁵ ABOUT SELF AND A GOOD OPINION ABOUT OTHERS

Sheikh Umar, special prayers from Sharaf Maneri! O brother, the custom of this group is that every good opinion members have concerns others, while every lowly opinion concerns themselves. They don't consider themselves worthy of anything, neither in this world nor in the next. When they hear some promise mentioned in the Quran or Traditions concerning today or tomorrow, they apply it to others. On the other hand, if they hear of any threat they think that it applies to themselves. Anybody who observes them closely doubts this, yet they have become bereft of hope.

Anyone who takes fleeting pleasure in self
Will remain bound for years in hell.

There was a holy man who used to look at his image several times a day to see whether his face was the same or had turned black. There was also a mystic who was all the time praying: "O Lord, I want to go somewhere where nobody knows me." He was told: "O holy one, what sort of a prayer is this?" He replied: "It arises from the fear that, when I die and am buried in my grave it might happen that the earth does not accept me. I don't at all want to be disgraced." Those who have travelled along this Way know its dangers. What does anyone know who has not even heard of it?

It is said that a disciple said to his guide: "Where should I look for you tomorrow?" He replied: "On the bridge of Sirat."⁸⁶ "What if I do not find you there?" "Then look for me in hell," he replied. "But what if I do not find you there?" "Then look for me in paradise." When Khwaja Sufyan Sauri⁸⁷ was asked on the day before the sacrifice:⁸⁸ "O holy one, what do you have to say today about the people gathered at Mt Arafat?" He replied: "If anyone remains unforgiven at this time then it will be on account of my bad luck, for I am among them."

Wise men have said: "A servant's faith in reality becomes perfect the moment

that some misfortune descends from heaven upon the people and he realizes it is due to him while, if any good fortune accrues to him, whether spiritual or material, he grasps that it flows from the blessing and favour of someone else."

Throw yourself down that you may be lifted up:
Bemean yourself so that you may be raised aloft.

The messenger Jesus was asked: "What's the point of so much travelling?" He replied: "I travel in the hope of prostrating myself on a spot where a righteous man has trodden so that the dust thereof may become my intercessor." Sincere people who have to face great danger have nothing to fear.

The near ones were greatly astonished:
What do you know about a king's punishment?

For the negligent ones this sort of thing seems impossible, but the wise know what it means, as has been said:

Even though the negligent laugh at this work
Nevertheless nothing pleases the wise except this.
The path of religion is not a trade or explanation:
Apart from ruins no other building is found therein.

The Mother of the Faithful, the righteous Aisha, was asked when a man became bad. She replied: "When he thinks he is good." Once it was said in the hearing of Khwaja Hasan Basri that there was a tradition which said: "The last person to be freed from hell would be released after 70,000 years." He said: "Oh that I were that man" and wished that his name were there.

It is said that whenever the prophet Abraham thought about his unintentional faults⁸⁹ he would fall unconscious. The grief and agitation of his blessed heart could be heard for miles around. Gabriel would come and say: "The Lord asks where you have ever seen one friend afraid of another?"⁹⁰ He would say, "You are right, O brother, but when I think of my faults, friendship is forgotten." The secret is this: "No one is safe from God's snares except those who are lost."

It is related that when the Apostle used to see Hilal, the slave of Mughira, he would come up to him and say: "O Hilal, pray for Muhammad!" When he prayed for him, the Prophet would answer, 'Amen.'

Know for certain that prey-seeking lions
Along this Way seek friendship with ants.

It is said that when Khwaja Bayazid performed ten pilgrimages for the intention of the Messenger, and ten for the intention of the ten companions, he was asked for an explanation. He replied: "I did so out of the hope of being an uninvited guest for, when the guest is someone held very dear, so too is his uninvited companion." The mystics say that it is easy to debase oneself in the eyes of the people. The real man is the one who does so in his own estimation.

There is a consensus among the experts of the Way that everyone who thinks he is even the slightest bit better than Pharaoh is actually worse than he is and, in the

opinion of this group,⁹¹ is still a proud person and a worshipper of self. It has been said that every tree which is tall produces small fruit, while each tree which is stunted produces larger fruit. A tradition states that when God Most Exalted revealed to the hills that He was about to converse with a messenger on one of them, each hill held up its head in the hope that this wealth would accrue to it. The hill of Tur⁹² however, lowered its head and said: "How could I be worthy of that?" When God Most Exalted spoke to Moses, He also spoke on it.

When a ring came down for Solomon, each of the three large fingers and thumb of his hand begged that it might wear the ring on account of its size. The little finger remained humbly quiet, thinking: "Who am I? I am nothing among them. Who would put it on me, since I am of no significance." A command came to Solomon: "Put it on your little finger!" Thus it is that men of insight say that no road takes you closer to God than indigence, nor is there any veil more robust than making claims. Look at the difference between the Devil and Adam!

When Khwaja Bayazid was asked when a seeker reaches the perfection of humility, he said: "When he no longer considers himself worthy of anything, nor does he find anybody else worse than himself in the whole world."

Khwaja Hasan Basri said: "I held everybody I met in higher estimation than myself, but one day I slipped. It so happened that an Abyssinian was sitting on the bank of the Tigris with a woman at his side and a pot in front of him from which he drank something from time to time. I formed a bad opinion of him and contempt for him welled up within me. Three people fell into the Tigris. The Abyssinian jumped up and rescued two of them and said: "O Hasan, rescue the other person, I'm exhausted." He turned towards me and said: "I have come here in my outward human form in order to test you. This is my mother and there is water in this pot."

O brother, mystics have seen the calamity and wickedness of the selfish soul by the light of mystical insight. They have understood that, as long as the tiniest particle of the selfish soul remains, so too do unbelief and polytheism, just as ritual impurity exists as long as a single hair remains unwashed.

When Khwaja Bayazid inquired, in intimate converse with God, "My God, what is the way to Thee?" a voice from heaven gave this reply: "Pass by your selfish soul and come!"

On one occasion the Law said to reality:
"The selfish soul is an idol, acclaim a sacred thread."

You have heard about so many men who had to suffer for the sake of breaking this idol. You and I have taken that very thing for a god. How could you or I be called Muslims? Alas! Alas! Listen to what the Quran has to say: "Haven't you seen him who chooses for his god his own lust" (Q25:43)? You should lament over your own condition!

Pain has struck: where shall I go for medicine?
I have mourned long: where should I go?

Letter 10

LOVE OF THE WORLD AND ITS CRITICISM⁹³

Don't think so much of the world as to envy it:
Having seen its nothingness, it is foolish to be sad.

Your letter and memento reached me, dear friend. Thank you! May God reward you for your kindness! The letter has been studied. It proved to be very agreeable and solid, and written in an altogether pleasing fashion. May God Most Exalted, by means of His grace and favour, keep you firm and straight according to what you have written! By means of His gracious generosity may He keep you safe and without sin when confronted with the calamities of the world and the wickedness and disturbance of the selfish soul!

O brother, every heart in which the world has found a lodging is tainted. If it is not proper for you or me to frequent a tavern, how can a tainted heart be fit for God Most Exalted? A person's heart is no more than that if it is filled with love of the world. There is no room in it for the world to come.

A house can be for goods or for meeting a friend.

Religion wells up from the heart and the heart treads the Path to God. It has been expressed thus:

Pass beyond body and soul, mind and religion:
On the Path of God's religion, hold tight your heart.

O brother, look carefully to see what predominates in your heart. If seeking the love of the world predominates, you will be carried off with the world. If seeking the love of the world to come predominates, you will be carried off along with it. If seeking the love of the Lord reigns supreme, you will be raised up with Him. This is the meaning of the tradition from the Apostle: "A man is with the one he loves." You will be bound to whatever you have loved today. You need to be careful here, for the fruit of your present state will become manifest at the time of death.

When the quest and love of the world have overcome a person, he will be confronted with the world and its ugliness, so that his soul may suffer a thousand trials and torments and die from the sight of it. When the quest and love of the next world have predominated, then the next world, with all its beauty and splendour, will be placed before him so that, by seeing it all, he may give up his life with great ease and comfort. When the quest and love of the Lord have predominated, then the intervening veil is removed so that, at the sight of the Friend, a person would entrust to Him not one life but a hundred lives without the mediation of the Angel of Death who would not know what was happening!

Out of eagerness for You lovers so offer up their lives
That there is no room at all there for the Angel of Death.

In the seven heavens this voice resounds: "A friend has reached the Friend," and a seeker has been joined to the Sought One. All mediation vanishes. "Whoever has the Lord, has all" is his throne and kingdom.

Once all this has been established you should realize, O brother, that there is a consensus among believers and unbelievers, sincere people and hypocrites, that the world is corrupt.⁹⁴ Its stock-in-trade consists entirely of disturbances and calamities. The claim to divinity, made by both Pharaoh and Nimrod, sprang from the world. The destruction of Balaam, son of Beor, and of the ascetic Barsisa,⁹⁵ came from the world, and all the troubles that befall the sons of Adam today come from the world. Thus a wise man has said: "If the Lord were to say to me, 'Embrace the world!' and were to add, 'If you don't do so, you will go to hell,' then I would accept hell, not the world." From this you will know what a calamity the world is!

It is said that there was a dervish, a celibate, who lived in a mosque. When the time came for him to die he tore his garment from his waist and flung it aside. People asked him what he was doing. He replied: "As I came so today do I depart."

It is related that when the messenger Adam in paradise ate from the wheat plant - which was forbidden - he quickly experienced a natural urge. He began to look around for a place to meet his need. He heard a voice: "O Adam, paradise is no place for that! You will have to leave it and go to the world. Out there you can attend to your need somewhere." Thus it is that wise men say: "The world is Adam's privy." O brother, in a privy there is no question of happiness and pleasure, or of comfort and delight. This is an indication of the fact that a believer ought to live in the world as if meeting the call of nature. In other words, he does so because of necessity, and with a hundred-fold aversion, dislike and unpleasantness, not with longing and happiness.

O brother, what sort of a thing is the world? The very condition of the whole world is as you have heard. What will be the lot of a person who grabs hold of it and bypasses religion? "It is impossible to join the two together," as has been said:

If you want this world, you can't have the one to come:
As long as 'you' remain, what place is there for God?

Holy men say that the world is a grain. Half of this grain went to Qarun, while the other half was distributed among all the rest. What will be the share of one person?

O brother, it is a difficult matter and much confusion has arisen around us today. It is as though a physician who is an unbeliever says to somebody, "Such and such a thing is harmful for you, so don't eat it," and he immediately restrains himself and does not eat it. Nevertheless, although 124,000 messengers have come and all have said, "The love of the world is the fountainhead of all sin," not a single one of us keeps his hands off the world. It is as though someone relied on what an unbelieving physician said but not on what 124,000 messengers said. Where is faith in such a situation? Consider it deception!

A scholar thinks he has acquired something:
What he has acquired is nothing but opinion.

Glory be to God, what an age this is! The words of the Messenger come to mind: "A time will come upon men when they will go to pray in mosques yet there will not be a single Muslim among them."⁹⁶ The Apostle has spoken correctly. We should throw dust on our heads and embrace our troubles and repeat what hapless Khusrav⁹⁷ said:

People tell me: "Go and don a sacred thread, O idol-worshipper!"
Which is the vein in Khusrau's body which is not a sacred-thread?

Here no hand remains, or pen, writer or paper. Nevertheless it is necessary that the letter be completed and the path of hope be vivified, for there is no reason for being without hope. It has been expressed in the tradition: "The love of the world is the fountainhead of all sin." It was not said, "Possessing the world is the fountainhead of sin." Moreover the heart, not the hand, is the abode of love. If somebody were to possess the whole world yet there was no love for it in his heart, then what hold would any law have on him concerning obedience and worship, and good and beautiful things? The lusts, pleasures and desires of his selfish soul would cause no fear.

Don't you see that the messenger Solomon possessed the whole world from east to west. Since there was no love for it in his heart he experienced no harm. The sign of the health of his state was that, for him, having or not having the world was one and the same. His happiness was not in having and possessing it, nor his unhappiness in losing it. This is a great work. It is not entrusted to everyone. To which king has this wealth been entrusted, or upon whom this strength been bestowed?

All cannot be entrusted with wealth:
Not every ass could bear the Messiah's weight.

O brother, comfort your heart with your hand and tongue, your pen and paper, your finished and unfinished work, and be hopeful that, on the morrow, Wealth might suddenly appear, as it has been said:

The country has been placed in the hands of a shepherd:
He is able to confer a whole world of favours.

Letter II

AFFECTIONATE AND PASSIONATE LOVE⁹⁸

My brother, Sheikh Umar, special prayers! O brother, just as prayer and fasting are external obligations, so too are affectionate and passionate love internal ones. Moreover they are leavened and fermented by grief and pain.

O brother, passionate love sweeps a person towards God. In that sense it has come to be an obligation of the Way. You will recognize passionate love as a sign of life, while its absence will indicate death.

It is said that, for lovers, hell means the fire of the passionate love of God. Thus it is that the more inflamed a heart is, the more precious it is. It has been put thus: "Passionate love is the Way; vision pertains to paradise; and separation, to the fire and torment of hell." The messengers have not left a legacy of gold and silver behind them. Whatever they received was due to their inflamed hearts and today they take pride in that.

It is said that passionate love is a fire. Whatever it touches it consumes. The hearts of lovers form a well-prepared fireplace. If even a particle were to fall outside, then both worlds would be burnt up. Thus it is said that the whole world is tormented

by the fire of hell, but hell itself by the fire of the hearts of lovers. Thus it is that a certain holy man, while in a state of divine inebriation, prayed thus: "O God, in Your kindness pass me by so that I may enter hell in order that all strangers might be saved."

Even though it be sinful, a madman is compelled:
Whatever he says flows from complete freedom.

O brother, if you can, obtain today but a particle of affectionate and passionate love so that these qualities will be with you in the grave: "The day when neither wealth nor children will provide any benefit except for him who brings to God a whole heart" (Q26:88,89). You have heard that the heart of the Friend was once inclined towards his son. In a dream he was commanded to sacrifice his son. When he expelled the love for his son from his heart, a command came: "The slaying of a sinless youth is of no benefit to Me. It is more pertinent to rid your heart of love for anyone except Me. Since your heart is now where it should be, leave the boy alone."

Day and night I am seated at your work:
Whatever you may do, I shall afflict you greatly.

Every heart that finds place for any apart from God is contaminated. Such a dwelling ill befits you or me, so how could it be a fitting place for God? If it is not fitting to tread upon the carpet of kings with dirty feet, how could one expect to approach God with a defiled mind? "God does not look at your appearance, nor at your works, but He looks at your hearts and your intentions." God does not look at external works. What pleases Him is the heart. This is what He looks at.

Do away with all concern for Way or judgement
So that your heart may become God's dwelling-place!

Know for certain that everything the heart is attached to today will, after death, itself come forward. For example, if the heart of a person is today enamoured of the world so that his goal and desire is the world then, after death, the world will show its visage to him. If someone's heart is attached to the damsels, castles and pure wine of paradise then, after death, paradise will be brought forward and fill his vision. On the other hand, if a person's heart is even today attached to God so that the aim and quest of his heart is the Glorious, Most Exalted God then, after death, the intervening veil will be removed, and He will display His very own beauty to him.

Consider the explanation of this Quranic verse in which God Most Exalted says: "Some of them harm themselves, some are lukewarm, and some of them outstrip others in doing good" (Q35:32).

Men are of three kinds. One is oppressive; another is motivated; while the third is grounded in good. The first one oppresses his own selfish soul and worships God, but his goal and desire is the world. The motivated person is the one who worships God but whose quest is for the damsels and castles of paradise. The one who is grounded in good is the one who worships God and whose goal and desire is the pure essence of God Most Exalted. As you have heard, men of God are different from other men, and the faith of such men is also different. It has been well put thus:

The world is for kings, emperors of Persia and China:

Beads are for angels, and purity is for men.
 Hell is for the wicked, and paradise for the good:
 Souls are for Us, and Our Life is for souls.

Letter 12

UNION WITH GOD

Dear dervish, Sheikh Umar, prayerful greetings from Sharaf Maneri! Read this attentively. O brother, wise men say that it is quite easy for a devotee to reach God. What is really difficult is abandoning the love of the world; enduring sorrow; not being preoccupied with clothing oneself and one's wife and children; and truly and sincerely being completely engrossed in seeking. For such a person, reaching God is quite easy. Whoever does not abandon the world and pass beyond the love of it, and who is taken up with worries about how he will provide for himself, his wife and children, and whose claim to God contains no truth or peace, and whose seeking is half-hearted, then it is extremely difficult for such a person to reach God. Every morning Satan used to say to a holy man: "What will you eat today?" He would reply, "Death." When he asked, "What will you wear," "A shroud" was the reply. "And where will you be?" "In the grave." He lost heart and left him in peace.

Consider this tradition about putting on a shroud:
 A man will clap both hands to his head at that time!

Thus, a seeker after God ought to nourish himself on death, clothe himself with a shroud, and recognize that his place is in the grave. In this way he might taste the sorrow involved in this enterprise and, being joined to God, become engrossed in Him. No other sorrow can unsettle his heart. Every heart that grieves over another is tainted. "There is no escape for the wicked."

Khwaja Shibli once paid a visit to Khwaja Junaid of Baghdad. He repented. He entered his house. On the first day he renounced the world. On the second day he renounced the last things. On the third day he reached God. On the fourth day somebody asked him when he had reached God. He replied: "Yesterday." "How did you manage that?" He replied: "The first day, when I repented, I rose above the world. On the second day, I rose above the last things. After that, no veil remained. Yesterday I reached God."

As long as an atom of existence interposes itself,
 A person is far from the qualities of the Sufis.
 As long as an atom of existence remains in place,
 It would be infidelity for me to plant my foot in love.

O brother, every heart that experiences this pain and this seeking dies to all other seeking and all other pain. "Inevitably the heart of a believer is the house of God" and polytheism has taken flight. No disturbance occurs where the king has pitched his tent. "Commonly, when kings enter a settlement they disrupt it, and those who enjoyed local prestige find they now have none." Khwaja Attar has this to say

concerning any fortunate heart into which this pain descends or which is gripped by this seeking:

If your heart contains a particle of the pain of God
 It is better than conquering both worlds.
 Unbelief for the unbeliever, and religion for the righteous,
 But just a particle of Your pain for the heart of Attar!

A couplet:

I'll become a Sufi and don the victorious robe:
 Daily I shall sing a litany in praise of Your pain.

O brother, just as, for a fortunate one, all the resources and conditions needed for happiness are present, so too, for an unfortunate one, all sorts of causes of misery are present. A fortunate one never falls along the Way while, on the path of the unfortunate one, a hundred mountain peaks have to be surmounted. What can a person do? "Why has everything been made easy? It has been created for him." If someone says: "Both are servants and equal in service, so where does this difference come from," say: "Because here the knowledge of the learned and the intelligence of the intelligent are both of little help. What answer can there be?" He knows better what lies in the experience of felicity and what lies in the experience of wretchedness. "God knows where He bestows His apostleship."

Khwaja Fuzail Iyaz was given over to banditry. It was said to him: "Khwaja come, for you have been called by Me." Balaam of Beor spent four hundred years on a prayer-carpet. It was said to him: "Go, for you have been rejected by Me." Umar Khattab was raised from in front of an idol, and a hundred thousand forms of wealth and blessing were strewn at his feet. The teacher of the angels, who spent 700,000 years in devotion to Him, was thrown down and branded with "A curse upon you!" Who has the boldness to say, "Why did this happen?" or "What was that about?" It is a long time since "He does what He wants" became known. The seal of silence has been placed upon the mouths of the learned.

This is my city and I myself enter therein
 That I myself might strike, drag and take hold.

"For He is the All-Powerful Master, He enjoys unlimited authority." Put faith in this work and do whatever a servant should do, because it is impossible for a servant to play the master.

The best servant is the one who obeys commands:
 He does whatever his Lord wants him to do.

Khwaja Usman Maghribi⁹⁸ has said that anyone who thinks that he will experience some manifestation from the Way, or some revelation from it, without necessarily engaging in struggle with self and serving others, is mistaken. It is related that Khwaja Ibrahim said: "Nobody attains the status of the manly ones unless he severs six knots. The first is to close the door of ease for yourself and open that of adversity. The second is to close the door of self-esteem for yourself and open that of submission. The third is to close the door of comfort for yourself and open that of sorrow. The fourth is to close the door of dreaming for yourself and open that of

awareness. The fifth is to close the door of independence for yourself and open that of dependence. The sixth is to close the door of great hopes for yourself and open that of preparing for death."

Worldly grief arises from the absence of grieving over the world to come. "Whoever loves money does not love the world to come." It is said: "This world is the abode of illness and human beings are its mad inhabitants. They are bound and imprisoned in this abode." It is correct to say that the lust of our selfish souls is our bondage and our sins are our imprisonment. Men of perception say that the love of goods shows the tendency of the eyes of the heart, while the love of position shows the tendency of the eyes of the mind. When the heart becomes blind the reality of the life to come is hidden from it. When the eyes of the mind become blind the reality of God becomes hidden. What lies before an unfortunate one? Every written communication that reaches you, my brother, should be studied continuously with an attentive heart, not according to habit. It is preferable to read the stories and anecdotes by yourself. A very eminent sage was asked: "If a time comes when we do not find members of this group, what should we do?" He replied: "Every day you should read a portion of their writings." Evidently when the sun disappears one makes use of light from a lamp.

It is said: "One pen equals two tongues." You can say that whatever you hear from a pen you hear from the person's mouth. Furthermore, whatever you hear from his mouth you hear from his heart. The injunction of the pen is the injunction of the tongue, and the command of the tongue would be that of the heart. Moreover, his heart listens to God. Thus the command of the heart is that of God. Inevitably whoever is obedient to what is written is submissive to what is said. Whoever is obedient to the tongue is obedient to the heart, and whoever is obedient to the heart is obedient to God. "Whoever obeys the Apostle obeys God" (Q4:80) means the same thing. Study the matter carefully. The author of the following has given us a hint:

The mediator of this people has arisen:
Of necessity, his word alone is correct.

The meaning of the saying, "The intention of the Lord is to be seen in the mirror of the spiritual guide," is found in the renowned Righteous One, who saw God in the pure soul of the Chosen One. This means that, through the Chosen One's mystical knowledge, the divine commands and prohibitions reached the Righteous One from his blessed heart. The pure soul of the Chosen One was, for the Righteous One, Abu Bakr, a mirror in which he saw God. In accordance with this meaning, if someone were to say here, "From this saying, it necessarily follows that one can say, 'God is in the soul of the guide.'" Realize that God Most Exalted, however, is much more exalted than that!

O brother, if someone says, "I saw myself in a mirror," of necessity he was in the mirror. Here also it is necessary that the Creator be in creation. Since creation without a Creator is impossible, everyone who beholds creation knows that it has a Creator. This knowledge of his means seeing the Creator in creation, as it is said:

I see You in whatever I behold.

In a similar fashion, without any difference, is the novice's seeing the Lord in

the soul of his guide. "A believer is a mirror for a believer" gives an indication of this. If somebody desires to see for himself whether he is a believer, a hypocritical unbeliever, or a sincere person, say to him: "Look in the mirror of perfect men in order to realize what you are!" Such a person, however, must have vision, for it is impossible for a blind man to see his blindness in a mirror. Umar Khattab was forced to see his own defects in the mirror of Abu Bakr. Abu Jahl was blind. What benefit could he derive from the mirror of Abu Bakr, the Righteous One?

Who suffers from this grief today? The fish in the water and the birds in the air weep over you and me. We should lament over ourselves today so that nobody will have cause to grieve for us tomorrow. Since "those who die are lifeless and cannot feel anything" applies to us, it is impossible to bring this about by ourselves.

I read all their books thoroughly:
I hope to emulate them, but I cannot!

Letter 13

THE EFFECTS OF COMPANIONSHIP

Sheikh Umar, special prayers from Sharaf Maneri! O brother, a long time has passed since it was said:

The companionship of good men has vanished from the earth:
A beehive has been converted into a hornets' nest.

Our age is bereft of eminently holy men. Moreover it has become difficult nowadays to experience those good qualities and behaviour of theirs which are capable of producing a spiritual birth. Those who say "a novice is the child of his guide" do so on account of his good qualities and behaviour, not on account of his appearance. This cannot be obtained without the companionship and service of the group. This qualitative relationship, which is a second birth, should be sought to be established with them as far as possible, for "a man's religion depends on that of his friend" has a timely importance. It is a pointer to companionship. If a person associates with good people then, even though he is bad, he will become good. On the other hand, if someone associates with bad people then, even though he himself is good, he will become bad. "Companionship has an effect" is correct.

Associate little with the evil lest you become like them:
The human soul is a creature of habit.

Thus it is said that, for a capable seeker, a day spent in good company will make him more perfect than forty or fifty years spent in self-struggle or austerity. Without the company of the group the novice and seeker would inevitably be destroyed, for "Satan is with the solitary" but "he remains at a distance from two people." Because of this story the sheikhs have always insisted on companionship for their novices. The effect of association is not hidden from any intelligent person. By associating with men a falcon becomes learned. A parrot, upon receiving instruction from man, is enabled to talk. A horse, on being trained by man, leaves its animal behaviour and

imitates that of man. A beast unused to the yoke, if coupled with one that is, moves in the right way and becomes one of a pair. All of this is the effect of associating. It has a very great impact indeed.

Place a wild horse together with a tame one:
They will become one in nature, if not in speed.

It is said that, if a carcass is thrown upon a heap of salt, after some time it will turn to salt. It will be subject to the same laws as pertain to salt. What can be said about a group whose glance is a medicine and whose speech dispels sickness? They speak for the sake of God or keep quiet for His sake. In all their behaviour they imitate the qualities of God, being rescued and delivered thereby from the hand of Satan and their selfish souls. Their secrets are occasions for receiving divine secrets. Under the deputyship of the King of the prophets, "My community resembles the prophets of the sons of Israel," they are seated on the prayer-mat of inviting people to God. What could their companionship do for you? If you are dead, it will bring you to life. If you are a demon, it will make you an angel. If you are copper and iron, it will turn you into gold. If you are alive, it will make you the elixir of the world. If you are the meanest of the mean, you will be raised to the heights. Look at the companions of the Prophet. Each one of them had prostrated in front of idols in a temple and had wandered lost in the wilderness. Suddenly the companionship of the King of prophets and saints shone forth upon the world. Each one of them became a star in the firmament of the religion of Islam and provided guidance for the people until the Day of Resurrection. This is bound up with following them. Beat the drum of their wealth in the world, for "My companions are like stars. Whomsoever you follow you will be led on the right path." Glory be to God! On all sides behold the alchemy of their companionship so that you may realize that every wealth and blessing is found in the companionship of this group.

Seek the shade of those mounted upon the sun:
Seek grief for yourself and comfort for your friends.

Those mounted upon the sun are, in reality, the people who have courageously trodden underfoot both worlds. The sun itself is none other than girded for their service. Heart and soul, rank and goods, wife and children, home and property, offer all in ransom, provided you find a place in the shade of their Wealth!

If you want to see for yourself one Bayazid,
You have to be of service to a hundred Yazids.

A holy man was asked: "How many years did you spend in the company of Usman Maghribi?" He looked at him angrily and said: "I did not simply keep company with him! I was at his service." Upon investigation it turns out that it is really service, not association, that is implied, no matter how much it is called 'association.' When an upright seeker enters into the company of this group and becomes well behaved on account of their manner of living and, imitating their behaviour, this way of life is rendered easy for him, he acquires laudable states and a refined understanding through association, just as an unlit lamp is lit by contact with another which is itself alight. The question of a guide and a genuine disciple is investigated from this angle, and the secret which is contained in the relationship of guide and disciple becomes

known in this way. Because of the beauty of divine friendship - the basis of the companionship which exists between a guide and his disciple - the disciple emulates his guide, just as a son, at birth, shows a resemblance to his father. One can thus talk about two births: one according to appearance, and the other by way of good qualities. According to appearance, a son is the offspring of his own father, while, as far as qualities are concerned, a disciple is the offspring of his own guide.

It is related that Jesus said: "Whoever is not born again in the heavenly and earthly realms does not enter." In other words, just as through his birth by appearance he comes into this realm and he sees the world of this realm, in a similar fashion, by the coming to birth of qualities he enters into both the heavenly and earthly realms. Whatever divine secrets and treasures are in the heavenly realm are seen by him. This is called 'manifestation.' The external realm is called the 'world,' while the heavenly realm is also called a 'world.' Likewise, "Abraham saw both heavenly and earthly realms so that he might be among the staunch believers." This is the point, and only by the birth of qualities can perfect faith be acquired. It has been put thus: "If the veil is lifted, wouldn't there be an increase in faith?" If something is perfect, what further increase can there be? By this birth of qualities, a person becomes worthy of the inheritance of the prophets. "The religious scholars are the heirs of the prophets" applies truly to such people, not to those who today have a high opinion of themselves. Now there are some people close to this group who are not yet in the womb of their mother but are still in their father's loins. They have yet to reach their mother's womb.

Moon-faced ones have minds that are not clear:

They seek position, and are sellers of their faith.

In knowledge, all are like magicians:

Externally a Moses, internally a serpent.

They have bypassed the path of Law and duty

And become thirsty for one another's blood.

Wise men say that, whoever has not received the inheritance of the prophets has not yet been born, even though his knowledge be perfect, for his intellect would be barren and he would not be able to walk around in the heavenly realms by the light of the Law, nor be aware of the secrets of the worlds, nor be illuminated by the light of the Law. In the birth of qualities, however, as we have said, anybody about whom people say that he is not worthy of the inheritance of the prophets has not passed beyond what is external and visible. Such a person passes his life in explaining distorted ideas.

The path of religion is not a trade or commentary:

Nothing else except ruin is found therein.

O brother, all this wealth and blessing is bound up with the company and service of this group. Today everybody sits at home waiting for the supererogatory morning and mid-morning prayer. Alas, alas, it is nothing but a dream!

Abu Bakr Tamastani has said: "Keep company with God, and if you are not capable of doing that, then associate with somebody who does keep company with God so that the blessing of his companionship with God may help you attain the same." One sign of this is the consensus among this group that a disciple has two

periods with this spiritual guide. The first is when he drinks milk. The second is when he has been weaned from milk. Just as in human sonship if a small, unweaned child is separated from its mother, it would perish, in the same way, if a novice is separated while still at the stage of drinking milk, he too will perish. The time for an ordinary child to be weaned is known, but do you know what is meant by "the time to drink milk" with reference to novices? It is necessary to partake of the company of a guide, and he knows how long it should last. It is not for the novice, who has the qualities of a child, to separate from his guide unless he is bidden to do so. The time for him to be weaned is when his guide perceives he has become firmly established in his own essence. That happens when the eyes of his heart have been opened and he is able to understand the praises and censures of the Lord, realizing that they come "from God." If he is separated before the time for weaning, he will become sick along the Way and fall back into worldly ways and desires. This would be the end of him, just like the separation of a child at the breast. There is no difference between the two. This itself has been witnessed, namely, which fortunate one is blessed along this Way and which luckless one has been left behind.

To whom can I complain about You? There is no Other,
Nor is there any hand higher than Yours.

The person You guide will not get lost:
For the one You lead astray, there is no guide.

"The one who is guided by God does not go astray, while there is no guidance for him whom God leads astray." There is nobody who, by strength of arm, can become a bestower upon anyone.

In the darkness of night God's friends
Shine forth like the brightness of day.
This happiness is not from might of arm:
It is a gift bestowed by God alone!

O brother, since the companionship of this group is precious and refined the behaviour acquired from their company is also precious and refined. The observance of all this flows necessarily from companionship. The description of everything cannot be contained in a letter. "Knowledge is acquired from the speech of men." Imam Ghazali was asked: "How did you reach this degree of knowledge?" He replied: "If I didn't understand something, I asked about it. I didn't think it was shameful to do so."

Ask humbly about what you don't understand
And you will be guided gloriously along the Way.

Letter 14

THE OBEDIENCE OF A DISCIPLE TO THE INJUNCTIONS OF HIS GUIDE

To the aforementioned Sheikh Umar. Dear brother, your letter reached me. I felt close to you when I read it. You had plainly written that you intend to come after the monsoon. Don't trouble yourself in this fashion! Your difficulty is clear.¹⁰⁰ The

matter has been straightened out, namely that "hearts bear witness to one another and consciences converse intimately."

It is to be hoped that your aim will be achieved. You might say, "How could I have such capacity and perfection that links one heart to another, yet the ear and tongue know nothing about it?" A disciple¹⁰¹ should be like Abu Bakr the Righteous and a guide like the Chosen One who said: "God has not poured anything into my heart which I have not in turn poured into the heart of Abu Bakr." This is "pouring from one heart to another, yet the ear and tongue are ignorant of it." What a disciple, and what a guide! While they were in the world there was no question of seeing such a guide or of hearing about such a disciple.

My answer would be that I would say, in the words of the statement, "The pen is one of two tongues." Whatever reaches you in the letters of your well-wisher¹⁰² proceeds from his tongue, and whatever proceeds from the tongue of a well-wisher comes from the heart. Since the tongue executes the command of the invoker of blessings, it is actually carrying out the desire of his heart. "Whoever obeys the tongue obeys the heart, and whoever obeys the Apostle obeys God." In order that your eye might be single, look carefully. What you hear about discipleship would amount to worshipping your guide. This occurs when your moving and stopping are at the behest of your guide. You are then the disciple of your guide. If you follow your own desires and aims you are a disciple of what you want and desire, not of a guide.

As long as habit is your escort along the Way
 You are a Satan or a hypocrite, not a dervish.
 Bind yourself to your escort's stirrup
 So that he may release you from this bond!

Today's world is full of guides and disciples. It seems that the tumult of the last age is increasing day by day to such an extent that the saying of the Apostle, "At the last age a day will dawn upon my community when people will be praying in the mosques, yet not a single Muslim can be found," seems to have been fulfilled. It is the considered opinion of this group that, if a guide commands a disciple to do something which is against the religion of Islam then, if the disciple acts against his religion but in conformity to the command of his guide, he would be a real disciple of his guide. If, on the other hand, he acts contrary to the injunction of his guide yet in conformity to his religion, then he would be a disciple of his own religion, not of his guide.¹⁰³

Let him be your guide: don't go seeking the Way:
 Let him be your tongue: don't engage in idle chatter.
 Consider his every word a profound secret:
 Whatever he does, consider it an act of God.
 An intermediary has arisen for this people:
 Whatever he says must surely be correct.
 Since you cannot see the Other, except in metaphor,
 Listen to all he says, then speak through him.

A person who studies his own religion is called a scholar, not a disciple of a guide, unless he is imitable. What does it mean to imitate him? If he is the leader, what business is it of his follower to go against his example? A sick person has no

other option than to act in accordance with the instructions of a physician. What would happen to him if he were to tell the physician: "Give me that medicine, not this one!" Or, "Give me so much of such-and-such a medicine!" If he already possessed this knowledge, he would himself be a physician. What need would he have of a physician? He could look after himself. Perhaps a poison which, of its nature, is lethal, in some instances could become a medicine. Guides are the physicians of what is innermost. Sickness has many different causes. For each different cause he will naturally prescribe a particular medicine.

Externally He makes your work appear useless,
Yet He turns your thorns into a rose garden.
Any enmity which comes from one's Friend
Is but a defect utilized in His work as architect.

If a guide is not like this there can be no question of guidance. Rather, he is still sick and infirm and in need of a physician. How is it possible for him to play the physician with respect to another? It has become known that every defect in work done today arises from the fact that disciples do not know what discipleship entails, nor do guides understand what spiritual guidance involves. People have become content to accept as real what is simply custom and dub it 'discipleship.' It is all aberration and error and fraught with destruction! There is nothing substantial therein.

The plate is empty, yet the flies abound:
The caravan has nothing, yet what a commotion!

O brother, although Imam Junaid could say in his day, "Our knowledge has been folded up and we speak about marginal matters," then today when, as far as appearances are concerned, there is knowledge of the Law, confusion has arisen and it is close to being obliterated. What can people say about knowledge of the Path and of Reality itself? In today's world who experiences this very grief?

What love do men have for religious matters?

If it were fitting for a novice to weigh the actions of his guide on the scale of his knowledge and intellect, he would have no need to remain a disciple himself. On the contrary, he would himself be a guide. If it were possible to weigh a hill on a scale then it would be possible for a novice to weigh the actions of his guide on the scale of his own limited intellect! Just as you know that the former is impossible, so too is the latter. That is the sort of novices we are left with, whereas men graced by God have grown fewer.

Those whose hearts are aware
Shy away from 'why' and 'wherefore'.

The ear should attend to its own work, as commanded by the eye, which is endowed with perception. What is the work? For each person there is a particular work. Apart from that person, who has power therein? What influence can an ignorant man have on a learned one? What awareness does a child have of the work of an adult? The work of guidance is proper to spiritual guides, and that of discipleship, to disciples. It is not fitting for a guide to play the disciple, just as a disciple should not presume to be a guide. What is the work of a guide? It means influencing a disciple

by means of one's knowledge and sanctity in order to improve the disciple. What is the work of a disciple? It means being amenable to the various influences of his guide as he attempts to improve himself, just as a dead person is entirely in the power of the washer of his corpse.

Become His dust and play the king:
Become His, and do what you will.

If there is even a trace of objection or criticism within the disciple regarding the influence of his guide then he would not be a disciple at all, nor would he have attained the stage of discipleship. If a community, with respect to its messenger, raises objections and criticisms against the words and deeds of its messenger, then there would be confusion in its faith. The same thing applies, without any difference, to the relationship between a guide and his disciple. Much has been narrated concerning it. If a guide commands something at variance with religion the disciple should act against religion and in accordance with the command of his guide.

Let him be your guide: don't go seeking the Way:
Let him be your tongue: don't speak frivolous things.
Consider his every word to contain a sublime secret:
Consider his every deed an act of God.

If an ignorant person comes forward to deny, criticize and argue the point - for this saying is not according to his capacity, and when, in his whole lifetime, would that unfortunate one ever have heard such things - he would certainly say, "This is an old deception!" Ain ul-Quzat has expressed it well:

Don't take me with you! Advance yourself along the Way:
And may peace be your lot, but turmoil mine!

O brother, the work of discipleship is not an easy affair, nor is it the work of every idle, deceitful or ignorant fellow. The type of discipleship which has arisen nowadays, however, is very easy. What difficulty is there in it? Don't you see that the world today has been filled with guides and disciples? In their assemblies they speak of nothing except divine manifestations and miracles, and about spiritual states and stages. If you were once to ask them about unbelief you would find them totally ignorant.

Till now they don't know the first thing about unbelief:
What would they know about the realities of faith?

This very thing happens today so that, after this, where will a person reach and what will come to pass? God knows best! This is arising nowadays out of ignorance and carelessness, both of which are increasing day by day.

Since intelligent people clearly know the day,
They know the heedless continually suffer misfortune.
Acquire knowledge, if you are of Adam's stock:
You can even learn something from a dog.

In connection with this read the following Quranic verse: "O Lord, rescue us from this town whose inhabitants are oppressors; give us a champion from Your

presence; and give us from Your presence a defender" (Q4:75). Thus every time you write will prove to be an opportunity for writing something - God willing - even though neither you nor I have any portion apart from reading and writing. There should be somebody whom you and I can accompany.¹⁰⁴ That also is no small matter. "A drowning man will clutch at a blade of grass." For those left behind, this is the condition of the work.

Know for sure that tigers on the prowl
Seek friendship with ants along this Way.

Letter 15

THE QUALITIES OF GUIDES AND THE BLAMEWORTHY CONDITION OF THE EXTRAVAGANT¹⁰⁵

God Most Exalted has said: "You¹⁰⁶ shall have no power over My servants" (Q15:42). Whoever has entered the world of the heart has escaped from the clutches of being a worshipper of Satan and has become a religious leader fit to be imitated. Spiritual guidance is entrusted to such a person, not to someone who is still enmeshed in the world of the selfish soul and has not yet reached the world of the heart. Men of God are of one kind, while the Devil's minions are of another. Do you know what the virtues of men of God are?

Since they are placed in the divine presence,
Anything unsuited to Him is trampled under foot.
Everybody's desire arises from his conscience:
He who embraces God and abandons others becomes a guide.
You quaffed one draught in front of the Cup-bearer:
Whatever is left, let it remain behind.

Anyone who is caught up in the darkness of the selfish soul is an abode of demons. Whatever makes its appearance from him is for the sake of his prone-to-evil soul. Even if he looks devoted, nevertheless demons reside within him. Whatever he turns his hand to will be tainted by what is within him. If he wants to come up with some work untainted by any demon then he will have to entrust the bridle of his own work into the hands of a man whose name is inscribed in "You shall have no power over My servants" (Q15:42). So, if he says, "Do this, but don't do that," then his command would not be that of Satan, for there is no way by which Satan can enter his heart. Whatever emerges from a heart closed to Satan would be divine, not satanic.

Consider his every word a powerful secret:
Consider his every action a deed of God.
Become his dust and you will be a king:
Become his and do whatever you wish.

You might ask, at this stage, "Was there ever anybody in this world to whom Satan had no access?" O brother, there is nobody whom Satan did not test and seek to influence! There were a hundred and twenty thousand examples of prophethood. All of them were wounded by him. It is one thing, however, to be his special tenant,

and quite another to be occasionally wounded by him, by way of testing, and to arise lion-hearted.

Give me your heart and see how you capture mine:
Call me your fox and see me become a lion.

If you had your very own horse and your slave mounted it in order to take it to water, would you say that it had become his? No, by God, not at all!

With regard to the disobedience of Adam all men are equal, but “the best of those who sin are those who repent.” What distinguishes and is necessary for a guide is not that he should be sinless. Rather, what is necessary is that a spiritual guide should have trodden the Way to God and become aware of the reality of what is involved. For example, if you wish to acquire knowledge from somebody, it is not necessary for him to be sinless. What is needed is that he possess that knowledge. Sinlessness is required for prophets, not for spiritual guides. Prophets have trodden the Path of God in sinlessness and with His grace because Divine Wisdom has made this demand with regard to prophecy, no matter how difficult or dangerous this Way may be. What would you say to the Distinguished One who is endowed with the quality of “He guides whom He will and leads astray whom He will” (Q35:8)? It would not be difficult or dangerous to associate as a disciple with that Distinguished One.

What safety is there on a path of fire?
What blame is there for a mad man?

It is for a moth to associate with a candle, and cotton with fire. Do you know how dangerous it is to do this? “The sincere ones are in great danger.”

On this side, need: on that, utter Independence:
On what basis do You play the lover with me?

Moreover, for the sake of others a guide who has fully trodden the Path of God and seen the Reality of the work needs to be present like a messenger. This way of proceeding would be without danger, for spiritual guides have nothing more than the quality of guidance, yet it suffices.

If you have pain, a guide will appear:
He will provide a key to unlock your pain.
An intermediary has arisen for this people:
What he says will naturally be correct.

This is the meaning of those who say that worshipping a spiritual guide is better than worshipping God.¹⁰⁷ By way of explanation they say that a guide is a better protector for someone than God is,¹⁰⁸ but we do not know whether they understand the meaning of this or not.

O brother, do you have any idea of what is meant by “the qualities of men,” for they eat and sleep and put on clothes; they have wives and children and go to the bazaar. “What kind of a messenger is this who eats food and walks in the streets” (Q25:7) is the criticism of the worshippers of external form by way of blame. Moreover, those men know in their hearts things to which, for you and me and the likes of us, there is no access. Khwaja Sanai¹⁰⁹ has praised them thus:

Those who sell their lives are almost nothing:
 Those in Sufi garb are the meeting-place of yore.
 We devoted ones are fully engaged in striving:
 We intimate knowers are whole-hearted in belief.
 "God does whatever He wills" with a sense of care:
 It is up to the servant to be fully obedient.

It is seen in alchemy that, in the presence of an elixir, copper becomes gold. Every man with a heart who receives a love-filled glance from that Heart is endowed with eternal life.

One glance from the Friend equals happiness untold:
 I am waiting for such a glance to come my way.

It has also been said:

I do not know what sort of men these were:
 Work never satisfied them for a moment.
 Inevitably they became the King's servants:
 The elite of the people became their world.
 Their pain is not acquired: it is bestowed:
 For such pain could not possibly be acquired.

O brother, on the Day of Resurrection such whole-hearted ones will appear like the sun in today's world. Anybody who performs some service for one of them, no matter what, or has a good opinion of one of them, will be under his protection in the age to come. The work of masters of the human heart is greater than can be expressed or put into writing and be comprehended by your feeble intellect or mine. Listen to how a poet has expressed it:

They are seated at a generous table,
 Having made a fire of both worlds.
 Their abode is above the heavenly lotus-tree,
 Their resting-place beyond throne and footstool.

Say: "What can a member of this group say and what can he write?"
 Of what use is the sun to the eyes of a bat,
 Or a rose-garden for an imprisoned cock?

It is not necessary that there be one in the whole world but it is fitting that there be ten, or twenty, or a hundred. Nor is it necessary for them to be in a city. It is fitting that they be in a village. Abul Hasan Kharaqani¹¹⁰ was from a village but had the perfection acquired by travelling a thousand years along the Path. It is said that, if someone reaches that perfection or not, "God gives His grace to whom He wills." If someone says, "Assuredly one of them will be the most perfect," then say: "This is to be expected." It is also proper that ten, twenty, thirty or forty, more or less, should be in one stage and this cannot be known, except by a distinguished person who has been honoured above all men. At that time he will consider how many they are and which stage each one is at. Investigators of Reality, however, say that the Prophet spoke in this fashion, "The thought occurred to me one day that I had met all the saints of God. On that day, however, I saw a saint I had never seen before."¹¹¹ How

can this control apply to anyone else? There is a hint in this tradition that you should pass beyond your knowledge and come to your helplessness. It would be better for you that you be one of the saints of the Lord or men of God to whom speech has come. They have been praised thus:

Do away with everything connected with self-esteem,
 Then you will acquire knowledge of the Self-sufficient.
 Their eyes are fixed upon the sanctity of Adam;
 Their names extend to the ends of the earth.
 In ecstasy, eternity itself has passed away:
 Why and wherefore no longer find a place.
 One in seclusion, in the Abode of every secret,
 Is self-contained and independent of everything.

Don't you see that the joy of all mystics, the most excellent of the Arabs and Iranians, on the Night of the Ascension reached the stage of proximity to God and of miracles. He came forward with, "I cannot praise You as You have praised Yourself." Moreover, the one who, after the prophets, was the most favoured and perfect of all the people, namely the Righteous One par excellence, said: "I understand my Lord by means of my lord." My appointed guide said: "Helplessness in understanding is understanding." Whenever a disciple is one in reality, not merely in outward form, this is what happens.

In loving You, helplessness is the master's secret:
 In Your lane bondage is the doorway to freedom.
 Being a guide along Your Path is common:
 Your grief is gladness for Your lovers' souls.

In what has been described above one question claims our attention: How can a helpless novice know that a particular person is a master of the heart and is of that group whose name, "You shall have no power over My servants" (Q15:42) has gone ahead, or is nothing but a pretender?

O brother, in tracing back this question one ends up at the problem of what is preordained and measured out. There can be no anxiety along his path for a person who, from the beginning, has been clothed with the robe of felicity and union as perfectly as Bayazid and Uwais Qarani were. As for another one without any wealth, has not a black blanket been woven for him? All these things are a form of restriction for him, and they will all be found along his path. "All things for which he has been created are rendered easy" is fulfilled.

The future of two men is settled in heaven:
 One becomes a lord; the other, a weaver.
 One knows no increase apart from the garments of kings,
 While the other weaves nothing except a black blanket.

Khwaja Attar has said:

Whatever the master puts in writing
 Can be read by a child at school.
 Speech is necessarily cut short here:
 Escort and traveller give way to the Way.

As it is said, the pen reached this point and broke. This is what is meant.

Another matter you raised is this: "Would you say a devotee can acquire an intimate knowledge of the Lord by himself without a guide?" The answer is: "If by this knowledge you mean that he knows about the being and oneness of the Lord, then this is attainable by means of his own intellect without a guide. Yet if by this knowledge you mean the perfection of seekers in their knowledge of the Lord Most Exalted, such as the perfection of Bayazid or that of Uwais Qarani or of Khwaja Ma'ruf Karkhi¹¹², then there is an agreement that this also, through self-struggle and asceticism, is attainable alone, without a guide or escort, but it is rare, and of a low degree."

How can a blind man possibly walk straight?
 It is not right for him to proceed without a staff.
 If you come to the Way without an escort
 No matter how strong you are, you will fall into a well.

In *Hilyat ul-Auliya*¹¹³ [The Ornament of the Saints] it is related that the Apostle said that in every age there will be forty persons with hearts like that of Moses; and seven persons with hearts like that of Abraham. At the end of the tradition he says that there will be one person with a heart like that of Israfil.¹¹⁴ There will also be a community known as Uwaishians. They will not have any need for a guide. Prophecy nourishes them in their cells without a guide as intermediary, as was bestowed upon Khwaja Uwais Qarani. Even though he had not seen the Lord of the prophets in his external appearance, nevertheless he obtained instruction from him. This, however, is something rare. At the very least, such aptitude and ability is not often found.

What is mostly found and more customarily seen is that it is acquired in the shade of the spiritual wealth of a guide and escort. Every perfection that you would like to acquire is a perfection of seekers. What I say in this matter is to study methodically and with full attention what pertains to the world of the heart, not the explanation of men caught up in custom and habit, for they come out with stories and fables - but God knows best! The result of the words of that group is no more than the words and explanations which roll off their tongues. On the other hand, the words of this group are from the heart, not acquired; from the world of "my Lord trained me," not that of "my Lord taught me" (Q12:37); from the revelation of secrets, not the abundance of repetition; and from what has been seen and tasted, not from what has been read or heard. The insight of masters of the heart is an understanding and delight of another kind which is hidden from externalist scholars.

The joy and grasp of masters of the heart is special,
 For their knowledge exceeds that of both worlds.
 Whoever is immersed in understanding that work
 Has thrown himself into an ocean of mysteries.
 When that understanding arises like revelation
 Whatever he writes will reflect what is correct.

It has also been put thus:

He shows His face to them along the Way:
 Who can explain well what this means?

Letter 16

PERSONAL PENURY AND THE QUEST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Addressed to the afore-mentioned Sheikh Umar. Two letters from you, my brother, have reached me. I have read them both carefully. O brother, although I deny things about myself and my work; and am bankrupt and without hope with regard to the states and stages of disciples; and am empty and lacking the graces of the perfection and understanding of the manly ones; yet, with a broken heart and fearful of my own existence, all I can say is:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

Don't turn back from the Path. Be stouthearted, and count this a great sign. Look in the Holy Book and investigate Reality. Just as the sending of rain upon the people happens after they have lost hope, so also the opening out of the works of the disciples and seekers occurs after they have felt bereft of hope. This is the meaning, and this group has expressed it thus: "God has ordained that no state should be bestowed upon a disciple until he has experienced his own powerlessness." This also flows from that saying. What should be done? All men of purpose, as they set about the task, advance in this fashion. An unfortunate disciple cries out and exclaims:

Point out the Path to a grief-stricken heart:
Open wide the doors for men with eyes to see.
Of all that exists I am the full remedy:
If I have not yet helped you, let Me do so.

The great Moses, in spite of his greatness, prayed: "O my God, where should I search for You?" A reply came: "Where you find a broken-hearted person who is fearful of his own salvation." He said: "My God, You will not find anyone whose heart is more broken or fearful than mine." The reply came: "Well, then, that is where I am, where you are, so that you might know that 'the heart is the throne of God.'"

If you are gripped by the quest of Perfect Love,
Only your heart can part the curtain for you.
The intellect is perfect for knowing God,
Yet heart and soul are more perfect than it.

It does not matter how well known, with good qualities and exemplary behaviour a person may be: the more broken he is, the more precious he is. Moreover, the more broken-hearted a believer is, the more his value exceeds that of both worlds. "I am close to those who are broken-hearted" is explained in these words: "The person whose efforts are directed towards God and are accomplished for His sake is of a high and exalted rank." Effort and the pain of not finding¹¹⁵ are in a similar vein. This very grief and trial stems from penury and lack of resources. Moreover, the mystics are an astonishing group. In spite of their knowledge, intimate experience, spiritual wealth and blessings, they are poor and needy.

O brother, the masters of the Way and those well-versed in seeking, on account of the pain of not finding and their own penury, continually long to be reduced to

nothingness and have the plane of existence purified of the dreariness of their own existence. What should one do? When one sees the difficulty of the enterprise as well as his own insignificance the crown of "but for you, why should I have created the heavens" is placed on his head and the garment of "two bows' length"¹¹⁶ is placed upon his body. He is nearest in crying out and bewailing his condition: "O that the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad!"

Ain ul-Quzat says that the ability to understand what that condition is, namely, when Muhammad, the Apostle of God, said, "O that the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad," and "No one feels secure from God's design except a doomed people" (Q7:99), is an astonishing work. A voice resounds on earth and God extends an invitation to the abode of peace. When they gird themselves for seeking and, in this hope, all run ahead and sacrifice soul and body, they are told: "You cannot help but seek, nor is there any rest by running and hiding." Moreover, "Seeking is driving away, and the Path means running" should be kept in mind. The secret has been put thus:

I stand at the head of the lane, rolling up my sleeves:
 You would think I was yearning for You.
 No, no, You are mistaken! How could I desire You?
 Rolling up my sleeves is simply a habit of mine.

As for the seekers and travellers along this Way, decrees are issued in this fashion in the beginning of discipleship. Their efforts would be of this kind until they desire that all might pass away, and they shut themselves off from themselves and place no hope in the works they perform but turn their whole heart to their own destruction. Do you know the secret of all this? It is so that the pursuit of righteousness might appear, and the righteous man might be distinguished from the false one, and the mere claimer might be separated from the genuine investigator of Reality for, at the beginning of discipleship, all are prone to make claims. "Inevitably there is need of proof and demonstration."

Imam Shibli was once apprehended on the suspicion of madness. A group of people came up to him. He asked them who they were. They replied: "We are your friends." He began to pelt them all with stones so they all fled. He called out: "O lying tongues, you claim to love me. Why are you fleeing from my unjust action?" This is to make you realize that a claim alone, apart from proof and demonstration, would be false. The hypocrites say: "We bear witness that you are the Apostle of God" (Q63:1). This word of theirs is right and correct, yet they are bereft of proof and demonstration. In other words, when righteous words are not accompanied by a righteous state, falsity exists, as God Most Exalted says: "The hypocrites are liars" (Q63:1).

You must have heard that one day the Apostle saw Harisa and said: "How did you pass the morning?" He replied: "I passed it as a true believer." This was a claim on the part of Harisa about the genuineness of his faith. Inevitably, without proof and demonstration, the Apostle did not let him go. He said: "There is a sign or proof for the correctness of every correct thing. What sign or proof is there of the correctness of your faith?" In proof and demonstration of his claim he said: "I have shunned the world. I fast by day and spend the night in vigil. I am like a dead man. I see the gold

and silver, marble and bricks of that lane. The divine throne is manifest to me and I see the lane along which the inhabitants of paradise are visiting one another, as also those in hell who lament and complain to one another." The Apostle said: "Hold fast to what you understand is necessary."

From the whole of this description it must be clear that you should not believe anyone on the strength of a claim without proof or demonstration. Unless these are proffered, such claimants should all be accounted as liars. How can the disciple be let go who, on the strength of his high resolve, claims to be seeking the Lord of the seven heavens and the earth? Everything that happens to the disciple along this Way is of the nature - as has been said - of seeking proof or demonstration of the truthfulness of his claim, not to leave him without hope and feeling lost. No such suspicion should be entertained about the Most Beneficent and Most Merciful One.

Whoever has placed his foot upon His Way
 Is guided and escorted by His intellect.
 The one who rises above his own soul
 Is favoured by his soul's Intimate Friend.

O brother, as gold and silver are tested by fire so that the pure might be separated from the impure, in the same way, a believer is repeatedly tested by misfortunes so that the sincere person may be distinguished from the hypocrite; the one who merely claims from the one who actually seeks Reality; and the truthful person from the liar. All the difficulties which are encountered in the abode of this world constitute this testing, whether it be misfortunes and grief, or blessings and comfort.

How does anyone know what wisdom is implied,
 What destiny lies in store for each living being?

I know¹¹⁷ that, from these words it will occur to you, my brother, to query how testing from God Most Glorified and Exalted can be correct, for testing is designed to make a person realize what he does not know, yet the Lord, by means of His ancient knowledge, knows all things as they are. This would be a very reasonable observation in this context. O brother, that would be a test for you and me but, for the Lord, it would be the making manifest of what He already knows. This is done by the action of a servant today. It is known as a test from the Lord and embraces the entire Law and daily difficulties. All are a test. These few words are a test, and trials and dilemmas, disturbance and misfortune all have this very meaning which has been ascribed to them.

O brother, as long as a single breath remains, trials will remain, for the world is the abode of calamity and disturbance. A hundred and twenty-four thousand examples of prophethood and apostleship were sinless, yet all of them had to undergo trials and testing. Where can unfortunate ones like you and me and the likes of us be included? Kingship or beggary, power or poverty, health or sickness, blessing or adversity, peace or discord or any other such thing, whatever it be, whether little or much, all are today a trial and a test. The difference consists in no more than that one speaks with gratitude while another does so with patience. What is known to the Lord from of old becomes manifest today in what a servant does. Thus the recompense and reward of the obedient result from their actions, while the pain and torment of the

refractory flow from theirs, not solely from the knowledge of old which is in congruity with this knowledge and wisdom.

It is better for a servant to obey:
Let him act according to his Lord's wishes!

Letter 17

THE HELPLESSNESS OF THE SAINTS AND PROPHETS REGARDING THE ISSUANCE OF DIVINE ORDINANCES

Special prayers for my brother, Sheikh Umar, from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Two of your close friends have arrived. They delivered your letter, my brother. I read it carefully. I have found it illuminating.

O brother, you have heard that our father¹¹⁸ was adorned with the crown of being especially Chosen by God and with the sinlessness of prophethood in the abode of Islam and accorded great respect and miraculous power. Nevertheless he did not remain free from trials and difficulties, from suffering and hardship, troubles and calamities. Also, by eating the wheat¹¹⁹, he saw what he saw. What would you say? His children have entered the abode of disaster and temptation along with thousands of people like Pharaoh and Nimrod. Could they possibly have found peace and comfort? "This is impossible!" When He said in the Word, "that He may test you" (Q5:48), He made it known that you were made for calamities. Glory be to God! An animal which, in its mother's womb, drinks blood, when it passes from thence to the abode of calamity, what can it be expected to eat?

I am devastated by the grief of all injustice:
The pain of all who, like me, have seen, knows no joy.

There is peace in nothingness, or in pre-existence. Moreover, all misfortunes and calamities constitute a proving for a being situated between one nothingness and another. When a mystic was asked what the cause of all troubles was, he answered, 'Existence.' Whoever wrote the following couplet has put it correctly:

O that my name had never existed,
And I had known neither agitation nor rest!

A dervish was on the point of dying. He was asked: "Do you have any wish we could fulfil?" He replied, "Nothingness, for it has no existence." In this fashion you might understand that all our calamities and disorders stem from existence itself.

When I inquired what my sin was, she answered thus:
Your life is a sin to which no other can compare!¹²⁰

In Persian it has been expressed thus:

O that you did not exist, Iraqi!
But since you do, so do all your troubles.

O brother, nothingness is a happy world. It is very comfortable indeed. It is a paradise wherein there is no hell. A cherished one says: "No matter how much I

described the joy of the world of nothingness, I would not have mentioned a thousandth part thereof." Men of insight, whose entire being today suffers great pain and anguish,¹²¹ are from the world of existence which is a target of calamity. "O that the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad" is the cry from an existing being who has become a target of calamities. Blows are the stuff of divine decree and destiny, and standing upright in the face of these blows is not a trifling undertaking. "So tread the straight path as you have been commanded" (Q11:112). Do you know what the difficulty is? When he said, "O God, if I draw a cloak over my head, You say, "O you who are wrapped in your cloak, arise and warn" (Q74:1,2). And if I emerge from my cloak, You say: "And part from them with a fair leave-taking" (Q73:10). What should I do? It was said: "O Muhammad, you are seeking comfort while We want you to be distressed. O Muhammad, you want to complete the account with Us and sit in a corner, while it is Our wish that, with each breath, We should be with you and you with Us, and the account should be a hundred thousand times greater."

If We see you rejoicing, We say: "Exult not, for God does not love the exultant" (Q28:76). And if We see your heart straitened, We say: "We know you are troubled by what they say" (Q15:97). If you are very zealous in worshipping Us, We say: "We have not revealed unto you this Quran in order that you should be distressed" (Q20:2). If you cut down on your devotions, We say: "Serve your Lord until the inevitable comes upon you" (Q15:99). If you sleep, We say: "Keep vigil the night long" (Q73:2). If you bring your goods inside, put them down and sit down happily, We say: "It is not your mother's lintel!" If you fall into ease and comfort, We say: "Warn your nearest kindred" (Q26:214). If you are hard on yourself, We say: "Lower your wing" (Q15:88). If you are kind, We say: "Be harsh with them" (Q9:73). If you are severe, We say: "If you are stem and fierce of heart they will disperse from round about you" (Q3:159). If you are respectful, We say: "Admonish them and sternly rebuke them" (Q4:63). If you are insistent, We say; "Speak kind words to them" (Q17:28). Just see the distress of a handful of dust! In this sorrow and difficulty who will not lament a hundred times over his soul?

O brother, since we have become captives of this false existence and targets of calamity, apart from saying that we are on the field of destiny and are placing our necks beneath the weight of what has been decreed, what can be arranged, since we are helpless in front of this decree and destiny? What can be done or where can we be borne? Will He make us sit in a mosque, or tie a sacred thread on us in a temple, or place a turban on our heads? Out of fear of what lies in store people become faint and hearts are afflicted. Glance at the teacher of the angelic world and look at Balaam, son of Beor. They throw dust on their heads. In spite of all that you have heard, the marvel is that it is said that an astonishing work has fallen to your lot and mine. Despite so much distress and wonder the command issued is: "Dedicate yourselves to Our service, and keep your hearts steady in the face of Our calamities along Our Path. Together with this, keep your hearts geared to yearning for Us."

O Soul of the world, all are astonished at You:
A hundred thousand intellects are perplexed by You.

Letter 18

THE FRIENDSHIP AND ENMITY OF GOD AND THE ABANDONMENT OF DESIRE

To Sheikh Umar. O brother, may God keep you safe from the evil desires of your soul! Know that, in the Glorious Word and Laudable Proof, the command is: "Let not the believers take unbelievers as their friends in preference to believers" (Q3:28). One of the realities of faith is love for the sake of the Lord. Anyone you love should be loved for His sake. Such a person is a believer. Anyone you hold as an enemy should be considered so on account of Him. Such a person is an unbeliever. When your intention is in tune with God's there would be no other desire or craving since you have placed your feet within the ambit of love, for "Love is being in accord with the Beloved with regard to whomsoever He loves or hates." This mutuality is expressed thus: "Befriend your Friend's friend, but hate your Friend's enemy." This is genuine strength and its benefits are without limit. Every love or enmity which is not purely for His sake is all blameworthy darkness and a curtain across the Way.

Burn and destroy everything except God:
Purify yourself of everything except faith.

Masters of perception have said that your selfish soul is an aggregate of all unbelievers, for its creation occurred according to the Magian religion. All its speech can be summed up thus: "To me, by me and upon me."

Every claim concerning the Lord involves both a contradiction and a similitude. Don't you see that God Most Exalted wants His devotees to praise and honour Him? Your selfish soul, as well as mine, wants this very same thing from all the people. The Lord also expects His servants to observe His commands and to flee far from disobedience. Your selfish soul and mine want this from all the people. The Lord wants everyone to yearn for Him and fear Him, while your selfish soul and mine want this from all the people. Moreover, consider this and investigate thoroughly whether all these claims are not both a contradiction and a similitude.

My forehead is marked from worshipping idols:
How long can I pretend I really am a Muslim?

Do you know what Khwaja Junaid meant when he said: "The basis of infidelity is following the selfish soul?" Also Khwaja Wasiti¹²² said: "The selfish soul is an idol and it is gravely sinful to look at it, but it is an act of worship to look into it." What does he mean? What is meant when you hear that sages have passed many years but have not taken a single step dictated by their selfish souls, and when mystics say: "Don't be heedless of your selfish soul, even if you have attained the heights of intimate knowledge?" What is the basis for saying so? When you understand all this you will know why they say so.

Understand that the selfish soul is an aggregate of all unbelievers. Just as it is forbidden to befriend unbelievers, and there is a strict duty to fight against them, so also there is a strict obligation to consider your selfish soul as your enemy and fight against it all the time, as you would fight against unbelievers.

On account of this infidel placed within me
 The number of Muslims in the world has decreased.

When you take hold of the sword of self-struggle with this intention and determination and come to do battle with it, if you kill it, then this is a great achievement. If you are killed, then you acquire the blessing of "the one whom I killed has become a martyr and I am his recompense."

O brother, anyone who has fought in any battle has seen how you can drive unbelievers back by the sword and, by it, can yourselves also be turned back. So also, by turning to God and remembering Him one can drive the demon far from oneself and can keep oneself far from it. The real struggle is with this infidel. "We returned from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle"¹²³ also pertains to this, for this infidel is inside your very shirt! There is no way of keeping it far away from you, nor of coming to terms with it, nor of resting secure from it. If you approach another enemy in a fair and friendly manner he becomes your friend. This enemy, however, is such that no matter how fair and friendly you are towards him, he will not become your friend, but will destroy you. The more inclined you are towards it and serve it, the more you will understand you have to struggle against it, and that is "the greater struggle."¹²⁴ As long as this worthless obstruction and veil of misfortune remains in place a servant is excluded from eternal felicity and unending wealth, and remains far from the beloved Sought One.

As long as a particle of self remains,
 An insurmountable gulf lies before you.

You must have heard that Khwaja Bayazid saw the Glorified and Exalted Lord in a dream. He said: "O God, which way leads to You?" The reply came: "Abandon your selfish soul and come!" He did not say, "Abandon the world and come;" or "Abandon people and come;" or "Leave your wife and children and come;" or "Renounce goods and possessions and come;" or "Observe the fast and come;" or "Perform your prayers and come." From this it is known that seeking God entails the strict obligation of abandoning your infidel soul, according to the demands of the Way, otherwise you will remain far from God.

As long as you remain in the grip of self-importance
 A hundred worlds of evil remain to encumber you.
 If but a trace of self remains in you
 Seven hells will emerge within you from this evil.

In this fashion Khwaja Abu Bakr Tarnastani said: "The greatest of blessings is release from the selfish soul because it is the great curtain between you and God," so that you might understand that the greatest of veils and the root of all man's misfortunes is none other than the infidel soul. This is why it is said that "the selfish soul is a mine filled with wickedness." When accursed Pharaoh said, "I am your great lord," it was this same infidel soul. This claim was quite open, however, but as for your selfish soul and mine, and the likes of us nowadays, it is hidden. It is afraid that, if it makes that claim openly, then the Law will attack its head with a sword. That accursed one, however, did not have this fear. You might say, "Well then, what is the

remedy for this pain now?" O brother, the consensus of spiritual guides is that the remedy for this pain is to oppose this infidel, and this is the chief form of worship.

Thus it is that when the sheikhs inquired what Islam was, the answer came: "Sacrificing the selfish soul with swords of opposition," and "Opposing it means abandoning its evil inclinations." Khwaja Suhail said: "There is no form of worship of God to equal opposing one's selfish soul." This bears out the current contention. Every night and every day, however, we bind agreement with it around our waists, but when God's servants take a firm stand before it, what else can they do except destroy it?

O brother, paradise - which is created - cannot be attained without opposing one's selfish soul. Thus it is impossible that anyone could attain the Lord and Creator of paradise without opposing his selfish soul. Anybody you see who has emerged pure from its pleasures and desires, and has taken steps, in a manly fashion, to oppose it, is standing on firm ground when he claims to love and seek God. If you see that there remains within him any pleasure or desire for this world or the next, which stems from his selfish soul, then realize that this claim of his is false.

Thus it is that sages have said that whoever, throughout his whole life, takes a single step according to the desire of his selfish soul, is lying if he claims to love. The least condition of love is to love your Friend's friend and hate your Friend's enemy. If you take a step according to its desire, you are loving your Friend's enemy. Where would love be? It is impossible to have something conditioned without a condition. A claim, without proof and demonstration, is false. You have heard how some seekers donned the sacred thread. This is a difficult work, and clearly the correct way of opposing does not come simply by imitating others.

Letter 19

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PURITY

Sent to Qazi Shamsuddin.¹²⁵ Peace be to you, as well as the mercy and blessings of God! O brother, the stature a man attains in both worlds depends on purity, and the threshold of all felicity and wealth is purity. Defilement and impurity are far removed from the path of messengers, angels and righteous men.

Burn and destroy everything except God:
 Purify yourself of everything except faith.
 Until you are rendered liberated from self,
 This infidel of yours will not depart from you.

It was said to him,¹²⁶ "Peace! The foundation of Islam is purity." No defilement stains him, and his beauty is not disfigured by anything. It is a long time since all the defiled ones were punished with this verse, "Which none may touch except the purified" (Q56:79), and were excluded from the household of Islam.¹²⁷ The glory of this news, "God is pure and none but the pure can approach Him" drove out all defilement from the Prophet.

Be pure, and become a man of faith:

Be that, in order to become this!

First of all it is necessary that one's clothes, body and food be pure and lawful. One's five senses should be restrained from sin and disobedience, while the heart should be kept untarnished by blameworthy qualities such as avarice, hatred or jealousy. When the first form of purity has been attained, a disciple has taken one step along the path of religion. When he has acquired the second type of purity, he has taken two steps along the path of religion. When he has attained the third type of purity, he has taken three steps along the path of religion. At this stage the reality of repentance appears. This is when the genuineness of a disciple is established.

O ancient sinner, in this ephemeral world
 Hasten to repent and you will be able to move ahead.
 Until you have become dirt, strive for devotion:
 Don't waste your life: do whatever you can.

This is called a 'revolution,' i.e. changing from a state of defilement and impurity to one of purity. Someone was a church and became a mosque; he was an idol-temple and became a hermitage; he was a demon and became a man. At that moment the sun of the reality of faith arises in the disciple's heart and Islam shows its beauty to him and the door to intimate knowledge is flung open within his breast. Moreover, without this purity, of what benefit to him is any affair or struggle which he undertakes? All such other things are habit and custom and imitation of parents. This is not Islam, neither is it religion.

Any desire which goes beyond this
 Is custom and habit, not religion.

It is not easily grasped that there are many people who are not real Muslims. Alas, all are Muslims through an external injunction of the Law! This is their belief, but it is based on dubious contentment.

There are many ladders to the sky:
 Yet you climb one rung and rest.

Realize that what has been described is the command of the Way so that you might not fall into error. The appearance of purity in a servant is of two kinds. One is the type which emerges from the recesses of the breast. That is an uncontaminated grace, and is said to be sufficient. This is something special. The prophets and righteous ones are distinguished by it. The other kind is that which is connected with what is external. This kind of purity involves struggle. It pertains to ordinary people. This form of purity begins with a person's dress. When a person wishes to attain this purity he begins with his dress. Study carefully what has been written about the origin of this, and do so repeatedly so that - God willing - its import might find lodging in your mind and you will not remain content with merely reading about it and understanding it, but will put it into practice, as far as you can.

Do something, don't simply talk:
 Work done along this Way is indeed work.

There are many benefits for one who is assiduous in renewing his ablutions three times. One is after sunrise; the second is after afternoon prayers; and the third

time is after night prayers. Thursday evening should be enlivened by worship in this fashion. A person should not eat anything at that time. After sleeping, he should renew his ablutions and perform two cycles of prayer.¹²⁸ After that let him use his prayer beads. Then let him arise and renew his ablution. With each ablution he should perform two cycles of prayer and recite the invocatory prayers which are said after two such cycles. In this fashion let him do so ten or fifteen times or as often as he can.¹²⁹ As night gives way to dawn, let him take a bath. Some people given to struggle with self have a daily bath early in the morning, and some bathe five times a day instead of performing the ritual ablution, because both have many effects. This is known to all who struggle with self. Keep this good work in mind. May God Most Exalted, through His favour and grace, keep you untarnished by any external or internal impurity!

Letter 20

AROUSING A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND COUNTING GOOD COMPANIONSHIP AS GAIN

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God grant you continual steadfastness in devotion! Peace and good wishes from the one who pens these lines! Study them. Let brotherliness take root and account the companionship of Qazi Sadruddin¹³⁰ a great benefit and consider it a sign of felicity. Night and day show yourself industrious in acquiring knowledge. Put aside rest and relaxation, sleeping and eating, for knowledge involves exertion, i.e. struggle with self and asceticism, just as purity is required for ritual prayer. There should be no activity without knowledge, just as there should be no ritual prayer without purity.

Knowledge is like the male, and action, the female:
Religion and wealth come from both.
Work without knowledge brings forth nothing:
An egg without a sperm can produce no fruit.

If somebody, for example, were to pass his whole life, as far as within him lies, in struggle with self and in an asceticism not based on knowledge, it would be like performing ritual prayers for years without an ablution, or reading the Quran without faith. Realize, moreover, that there are two types of knowledge. One is acquired knowledge which a person learns from experts or picks up by studying their books. The other type of knowledge is that which wells up within a person's breast. This is of three kinds. One is that which is joined to the hearts of the messengers from the Threshold Without Need. This is called 'revelation.'¹³¹ Another kind is joined to the hearts of the saints. That is called 'inspiration.'¹³² The third kind is that which, through the medium of the breasts of the messengers, reaches the breasts of the righteous, or which reaches the breasts of disciples through the medium of the breasts of their spiritual guides. This is the meaning of the tradition, "A spiritual guide is related to his disciples as a prophet is to his community." In other words, just as the upright find God in the mirror of the breasts of the messengers, disciples find God in the hearts of their spiritual guides, i.e. they recognize and know Him. This is what 'finding' means.

If even one word is imprinted on the tablet of your heart,
 You won't grasp a single hint about secret meanings.
 When every letter has been erased from your heart,
 You will have become the captive of hidden meanings.

Moreover, where the sheikhs have written that a disciple sees God in the heart of his spiritual guide, this is the seeing that is meant, not seeing clearly by looking steadfastly with one's eyes.

O brother, knowledge is the origin of all felicity, while ignorance is the origin of all evils. All salvation comes from knowledge and all destruction is born of ignorance. Heavenly ranks and holy powers are acquired through knowledge.

Pre-eternity is not for the sake of heaven:
 Fix the scaling ladder firmly against knowledge and action.

A person falls into the depths of hell and severe punishment through ignorance, while nobody except one of the faithful places a step in the hallway of knowledge. "God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light" (Q2:257), i.e. from ignorance to knowledge. Nobody is found standing on the threshold of ignorance except the unbeliever: "As for the unbelievers, their patrons are false gods who lead them out of light into darkness" (Q2:257), i.e. from knowledge to ignorance. Just as a believer should flee from wretchedness and unbelief, so too should he flee from ignorance as well as from ignorant persons. It is an injunction of the Law that "a wise man is my friend while an ignorant one is my enemy." Just as it is obligatory to flee from ignorance and the ignorant, so too it is a duty to seek to associate with scholars and knowledge, but with scholars and knowledge concerned with the life to come, not with worldly scholars and worldly knowledge, lest a person act mistakenly.

If acquiring knowledge is for you a game,
 Make of it an instrument and place of work.
 Knowledge bears you towards the divine threshold,
 Not towards your selfish soul, goods or rank.
 Knowledge acquired for palace and garden
 Would be like a lamp for a thief.
 Much self-struggle and asceticism will not lead you
 As far as a day's companionship with this group can.
 A poor ant wanted to visit the Ka'ba:
 It clung to the leg of a pigeon and suddenly was there.

Don't you see that the nature of wood and grass is to remain fixed and at rest. When they come in contact with water they begin to flow with the current of the water. In a similar fashion, although an ant cannot fly, yet, when it clings to a pigeon, it begins to fly along with the pigeon. Thus the flowing quality of water and the pigeon's ability to fly become the qualities of wood, grass and an ant, as has been described. This is a great mystery concerning association, as has been hinted at thus:

Yoke a wild horse to a tame one:
 Would they have become one in nature unless yoked together?

The nature of iron is such that it cannot float upon water or flow along with it. When it comes into contact with the wood of a boat then, even if it is forty or eighty kilogrammes in weight, it can do both. In this fashion you can understand the benefit of associating with this group and realize that you cannot emerge from custom and blind habit apart from the shade of the company of men of faith.

As long as your own habits are your guide
You are a devil and a hypocrite, not a dervish.

Letter 21 **CONVERSION**

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God Most Exalted guide you to eternal felicity through His grace and generosity! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines. Study them carefully, my brother, and recall that time and again you requested me to write something containing directions and advice on various topics. This also caused me a little uneasiness. For this reason I wrote several letters in quick succession. They should be studied carefully and their meaning verified with Qazi Sadrudin. This is what I want you to do. Since Qazi Sadrudin is there, it should not prove difficult. To the extent that you can, set to work, for work is fundamental.¹³³

Set to work, since it passes beyond talk:
For, along this Way, work is real work.

There should be no negligence in repenting time and again. Be resolute in doing so in order that God Most Exalted may lead you to real repentance, for it is of the nature of repentance to be the foundation for stages and states.¹³⁴ It is impossible to have a building without a foundation. Similarly it is impossible to have stages and states without repentance, since what is basically needed for the work is faith.

Who treads this Path? Faith does. Who bears this burden? Faith. Who journeys through this engulfing wilderness? Faith does. Who traverses this boundless ocean? Faith. Who tastes this sweetness, if not faith? Who is afflicted by this pain? Faith. Who shows what seeking entails? Faith does. When repentance appears, so too does real faith. The sun of faith warms each breast to the degree that it is repentant. To the extent that each breast is opened up through repentance, to that extent the sun of faith is able to warm it. It is a matter of the highest importance to take the stage of repentance seriously.

O inveterate sinner in this transitory world,
Hasten towards repentance, pass beyond self!

Real repentance is a transformation of one's basic nature. When a spiritual guide instructs a novice to undergo a forty-day retreat he does so for the sake of this transformation. He wants a change of nature to take place. When this happens, a novice becomes a different person. He is no longer what he seems to be. A different person has appeared because, since his disposition has changed, he too has changed. He formerly had a particular disposition which no longer exists. Therefore he no longer exists, even though his essence does - though that is not important. A

completely different faith has appeared in him. It is known as real faith. When this appears, dissipation disappears, for unity has been born.

By yourself, you see everything as numbered:
Transformed, you will see everything as one.

Before your transformation there was nothing more than conventional faith and movement of the tongue, as is true for most people. That is habit and custom, not real faith.

Any desire which comes before this
Is custom and habit, not religion.

With this lame-ass of conventional faith and movement of the tongue, which describes you and me, a person cannot proceed along this Path. He cannot bear the burden of this weight, traverse this engulfing wilderness, or relish this sherbet meant for men. It would be like a mosquito trying to carry the weight of an elephant.

Not everyone is the intimate friend of Wealth:
Not every ass can bear the Messiah's weight.

On account of the distance of those stages and the terrifying nature of the work it is not fitting, O brother, that you should entertain either slackness or fear, as these could induce you to flee from the Path, according to the saying: "Flee from what is beyond your ability as the apostles did." This fear could originate from what people write or say about these matters. There is no need for anyone, however, no matter what state he be in, to be without hope, for here the work does not have a cause. There is no such thing as 'recompense' involved. Many people have been raised up from in front of idols in the twinkling of an eye and have been borne aloft so quickly that, while the place where they had prostrated themselves was still warm, they had been caused to pass beyond the heavenly spheres and angelic realms and have reached a quality of being such that if men, jinn, angels and the heavens were to search for them, they would not find a trace of them. They would be perplexed and would say; "What has happened? What is this?" The answer is given: "He does whatever He wants" (Q85:16). 'Why' and 'wherefore' carry no weight in His Presence. 'Cause' finds no entry, for here the work is without cause. We make one a Bayazid and another an Abu Jahl. One We raise to the uttermost heights and another We plunge into the nethermost depths. There is no intervening cause. Expel 'why' and 'wherefore' to the world of men from whence they have come!

May God Most Exalted grant you the vision of Himself, my brother, and raise you up from before Him, through His grace and generosity, as shown to the Prophet and his descendants. When He lifts you up from in front of your self, He will beat the drum of wealth in front of your door.¹³⁵

Letter 22

PURIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may you advance in devotion to the Lord! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines! Study them carefully and be convinced, my brother, that you should try your level best each day to purify your conduct and change blameworthy qualities into praiseworthy ones. Consider it very likely that, as a result of carelessness and neglect in this activity, baleful calamities might begin to appear. "God protect us from them!"

It is well known that there are lions, beasts of prey and wild animals throughout the world. Each has a quality which is found in man. On the Day of Resurrection judgement will be given on the basis of the quality which predominates in a person, not according to outward appearances. This means the person will be given the corresponding shape. For example, if in this world a person is overcome by rage, on that Day he will rise as a dog; if overcome by lust and desire, he will rise as a pig; if overcome by pride, he will rise as a leopard; if overcome by flattery, he will rise as a fox. Other qualities should be understood in an analogous fashion.

It is reported that when the Friend of God sees Azar being borne off to hell, he will say: "Lord, what greater disgrace could there be than that I be standing in the courts of the blessed while my father is borne off to hell?" In the world I had said: 'Do not put me to shame on the Day of Resurrection'"(Q26:87). According to his external appearance Azar returned as a man, but he turned into a hyena, for this was the quality which had overcome him in the world. God said to His friend, Abraham: "What relationship do you have with this hyena? How is he close to you?"

On the other hand, the dog of the Companions of the Cave¹³⁶ was changed from its own form into that of a man and endowed with human qualities, for that dog had the form and qualities of a man, while Azar had the form of a man but the qualities of a hyena. From this realize that you should place no reliance on appearance. As far as appearances go, what is a man, an ass, stone or gold? The difference depends on what a thing really is. Ignorant people today, however, simply look at appearances. In the same way, O brother, there are many today who have the form of men but tomorrow you will see them raised up in the form of lions and beasts of prey. On the other hand, many that you see today in the form of lions and other wild beasts will be led forward tomorrow in human form. This substitution is difficult and the work is not easy.

Holy men have said that the mountain of Uhud - concerning which the Apostle had said, "The mountain of Uhud loves me and I am fond of it" - will shed its rocky skirt tomorrow and will stand in human form in the ranks of the righteous, for the quality of righteousness predominates in it. Inevitably it will be endowed with its form.

This kind of work is difficult, even terrifying, and nobody is preoccupied with it unless God grants him insight. A person should not be negligent but rather slowly develop a habit so that, little by little, these qualities should diminish and - if the Lord lends a hand - be entirely overcome. Thus a great work will have been accomplished. Anybody who wants to know which quality will be his tomorrow¹³⁷ should look into

himself today to see which quality is predominant within him. It will be the very same tomorrow. It is not difficult to understand this much. For example, if somebody wants to know if the Lord is happy with him or not, he should look at his own actions. If they are all acts of devotion he should realize that He is pleased with him, for devotion is a sign of acceptance. On the contrary, if they are all sinful, he should realize that He is not pleased with him, for sin is a sign of rejection. If both are present the order will be given according to what predominates. The world of today is no more than this. Any work which is not done here won't be done there either.

Once an intelligent man knows the day,
How could he become careless, night or day?

If wicked qualities remain in anybody and are not changed, even if he goes to paradise in the next life and all kinds of blessings are showered upon him, still those qualities will not disappear and there will be no turning back from what is then existing. A man would remain within himself and would not reach his real Wealth. One has to change here. If a person does not change here, neither will he change there.

Be pure, so that you may become a man of faith:
Be like that, so that you may become like this.

A person might reach paradise but, for all eternity, he will behold only himself and will remain within himself. All the blessings of paradise may be allowed to him, but he will not be able to do there what the manly ones will do. Although he may have a damsel of paradise, mansions, fine chicken and rice dishes as well as flowing water, nonetheless what would that mean without the Quest of souls, the Desire of hearts, the Orientation of all the just and the Ka'ba of all seekers? What has anyone acquired who has missed out on that Wealth? And what has a person missed out on if he has been granted the blessing of that Wealth? He is enriched by "Whoever has the Lord has all." This group is called "devotees of the One" for, in the light of genuine faith, they have passed beyond duality.

In duality the intellect is truly distorted:
The eyes of faith do not even see duality!

One should not let pass the fast of the days of the full moon¹³⁸ nor the attendant celebrations. There should be no negligence whether on a journey or at home. In order to overcome sleepiness one should bathe and perform one's ablutions frequently.

Letter 23

SEPARATION AND DETACHMENT

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God Most Exalted generously adorn you with devotion! Peace and prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines. Study the matter and be convinced, my brother, that, for a disciple, separation and detachment are conditions of the Way. Separation is from attachments and people, while detachment is from oneself: no vexation in the heart; no burden on the back; no numbering with anyone;¹³⁹ no concern for the bazaar in one's breast; nor any involvement with a particular creature.¹⁴⁰ Such a person's resolute courage has passed

beyond the pinnacle of the divine throne and, having shunned both this world and the next, has found repose in the Object of his desire. If he were to have both worlds but not his Friend, he would not be happy. On the other hand, if he had neither world, but only his Friend, he would lack no happiness. A much-loved person has said: "There is no sadness with God and no comfort with anyone or anything other than God." What are both worlds for a person who has caught the faintest scent of Him? Simply the dust of His lane!

It is said that whoever is veiled from the Lord is in the midst of calamity and grief, even if he has the key to the treasures of kingdoms in his hand; yet if he has all the signs of poverty and beggary which indicate his commitment to the Lord, he would be king of both worlds, even though he has no bread for the evening!

When all you have is bread and a patched robe
The tip of each of your hairs becomes a king.

This is why Khwaja Sari Saqati¹⁴¹ used to say: "O Lord, whenever You torment me, do whatever You like, but don't torment me by veiling Yourself!"

Don't roast the livers of lovers:
Don't destroy the houses of lovers.

O brother, the reality of hell itself is this very thing, as hinted at by the Glorious Quran with reference to the torment of the unbelievers: "Indeed they will be veiled from their Lord on that day" (Q83:15). The most telling point in torment is the veiling. Saintly people say that if the tent of union were to be pitched tomorrow in hell then all who were seeking and striving after Him would apply the fire of hell as antimony to their eyes. On the other hand, if they were to be sorely tried in paradise by a momentary veiling, their cries would be so great that the inhabitants of hell would have pity on them!

With You, my heart is a mosque: without You, a temple:
Without You, my heart is a hell: with You, a paradise.

When the glory and majesty of God become known to a disciple, and the pain of seeking catches hold of him, God becomes the Object of his desire and he realizes: "Whoever has the Lord, has everything; whoever loses Him, has lost everything."

Since I have You, I have everything: I need naught else.

A person can escape from the sight of everything except God, but there is no escape from Him, as was revealed to Moses: "You can't do without Me. There is an escape from everything else, but not from Me." Certainly the tablet of claim will be broken and presumptuous eyes will be opened. Life and death mean the same for such a person. Rejection or acceptance, praise or blame, all weigh the same in his balance. There is neither anxiety in his heart concerning heaven or hell, nor place in his breast for this world or the next. At this stage desiring anything other than God would be tantamount to unbelief. Such a person, for the sake of a mere particle or morsel, is scarcely ready to bow his neck before creatures! How can a courageous diver, who plays with his life in the ocean depths and brings up a night-illuminating pearl, look at smoke from the tiny lamp of an old woman? Here the desired Object is

as far removed from infidelity as gold is from penury. Here a person sacrifices his entire being for his aim, which is the divine threshold. His hand has been withdrawn from us and stretched out towards God. Along the Way, his ever-seeking feet trample underfoot the spurs of rank and miracles. The tablet of a good name and safety is washed clean. His way of behaving is such that, "if the divine footstool were to be placed before me, I would turn away from it. If this world and the next were to display themselves before me, I would consider them as nothing." His comfort would be this: to spend each moment on Mount Sinai seeking God and, like Moses, crying out, "Show me," while the reply of the sought One is, "You cannot see Me" (Q7,143)! What a work, and what profit for dust and water!

There is for us another world beyond this one:
 There is another dwelling besides hell and paradise.
 Revelry and recklessness flow from Love's abundance:
 Quranic recitation and self-denial are yet another world.

When a sincere disciple has acquired this separation and detachment, he is made known to people in this fashion: "O David, when you see anyone in search of Me, become his servant!" A messenger like David is to become his servant! Extraordinary! From this you can realize what others should be like. Divine things are not grasped by intellectual analogy but by the Will of God. He does whatever He wants.

He entrusts a kingdom to a shepherd:
 He showers blessings upon the whole world.

Behold Abraham, the Friend of God, coming from Azar's idol-temple, and Muhammad, the Beloved of God, coming from Abdullah's!¹⁴²

This Meaning is acquired by a disciple in stages and only gradually becomes apparent. To whom can it be revealed all at once - unless God so wills? Anyone who wants to learn the Quran by heart or become a Quranic reciter must surely begin with A, B, C and work through all the chapters till the final one is reached. Gradually he will become a reciter of the Quran and memorize it completely. The Way of the Lord follows this pattern. What should be done? The secret has been expressed thus:

You can become an angel, if you set out manfully and struggle:
 Just as the leaves of a mulberry tree can be turned into silk.

A disciple should not be upset on account of his penury, lack of merit, disloyalty or pollution. His gaze should be fixed on the power and grace of the Lord. If He so wishes, thousands of churches and idol-temples can become Ka'bas or Domes of the Rock. Thousands of sinners and scoundrels can become God's beloved and befriended ones. He can speak and - if He so wishes - without any intervening cause can instantly change thousands of unbelievers into believers, and thousands of polytheists and idol-worshippers into believers in One God. Countless thousands of reprobates are granted mercy and frequenters of taverns become engrossed in prayer. There is no scope for anyone to ask 'how' or 'why.'

What has been written in letter form should be read frequently and carefully. Several prayerful readings are required. God willing, my brother, your heart will become ever more attuned to Reality and ever more deeply rooted therein! This inner awareness will be like a brotherly presence dwelling deep within your mind. The fruit and benefit of all this will appear in your very limbs. There will be a certain external radiance about you, through His grace and kindness, through the Prophet and his descendants.

Peace!

Letter 24

SERVICE AND BEING A SERVANT¹⁴³

Brother Shamsuddin, may God Most Exalted adorn you with external and internal devotion! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines. Study them carefully and be convinced, my brother, that you yourself need to taste the sorrow of service. You should be a servant and serve correctly. When you become a servant, He Himself will be your Lord.

It is better for a servant to carry out orders
In order to get from the Lord what he wants.

What does it mean to serve? It means doing what you are ordered to do. What does it mean to be a slave? Well, a slave has a tongue but cannot ask 'how' and 'why.' Whether you are given sherbet or poison, accept it happily.¹⁴⁴ Don't interpose yourself saying, "I should have this," or "I shouldn't have that!" A servant shows no opposition to God! No matter what God does, he does not object. A friend of God was asked, "What is service?" He replied: "Putting aside all opposition; walking happily according to the divine decree; and, if poison be given to you, drinking it like sherbet, without a wrinkle on your brow."

O brother, being a servant is itself something great. That wretch¹⁴⁵ served for 700,000 years but was an utter failure. A true and genuine servant is one who has been purified of everything he owns and has been freed from the grip of desire and of his own pleasure. A Sufi was asked, "What is service?" He replied: "When you become free, you become a servant."

As long as self-awareness remains in this Presence,
A hundred worlds full of evil remain within you.
As long as the slightest trace of self exists in you,
Seven hells brimming with your evil will emerge.

A friend of God has said: "You will find many thousands of Abdur Rahmans, Abdul Wahhab, Abdur Razzaqs and Abdur Rahims in the world, but you will scarcely find a single Abdullah¹⁴⁶.

O brother, anyone who worships God for the sake of his inheritance is enslaved by it. He is certainly not a servant of God! Abu Ali Siyah has said: "If you are asked whether you would prefer heaven or two prostrations of prayer, don't even utter the

word, 'heaven!' Say: 'I shall perform two prostrations of prayer,' because heaven has already been decreed for you." Wherever one's inheritance intrudes, calamity and duplicity lie in ambush.

When Moses reached Khizr, he objected to him about two things.¹⁴⁷ One concerned the young man, while the other referred to damaging the boat. Since he had nothing to lose, Khizr kept quiet. When Moses said, in envy, "If you wanted to, you could have taken payment for it" (Q18:77), Khizr replied: "This is the parting between me and you" (Q18:78). Now that the question of one's share has interposed itself, close association has disappeared. When men of insight see this, they remove their selves and their inheritance entirely from their awareness and say: "We are slaves. What business does a slave have with possessions, portion and control?" This is because "a slave, and whatever he possesses, belongs to his master."

If a slave is accepted, well and good; if rejected, well and good; if honoured, well and good; if passed over, well and good. Whether he suffers or is promoted, it is all the same for him. What can he do? Go and complain to a judge? Or beat his head against a wall?

Kill me, strike me or keep me as You wish!
The only thing that I can do is work for You.

They consider heaven and hell as nothing. Indigent and without resources they set out on the Way. They see nothing except the Most Exalted Lord. They neither possess nor desire anything. One of God's friends saw a dervish. "Where are you coming from?" he inquired. "From God." "Where do you want to go?" "To God." "What are you after?" "God." No matter what the question was, the answer was always the same: "God."

I write Your name on the palm of my hand:
Eyes fixed on that name, I shed tears of blood.
I want nothing but to gaze upon You:
Wherever I look, I think only of You.

Seeking a reward for one's devotion and worship, or even thinking about the reward and merit thereof, is a fatal poison. In this fashion you could spend a thousand years at the divine threshold yet, even if the devotion and worship of the whole world were yours alone, you would nevertheless hear: "You are not worthy of Me! You should make a total gift of yourself."

The perfect have suffered much along the Path to God:
They lived lives of service, waiving all claims.
Become His servant, in order to become someone:
If you become His dog, this will happen to you.

In a bygone age a man had spent many years in devotion and worship. He passed his entire life in struggling with self and in undergoing many hardships. A revelation came to the messenger of that period. "You are destined for hell. Why do you take so much trouble?" When the messenger told him the revelation, he simply intensified his religious practices in a spirit of great joy and happiness. People were astonished at this development. They said: "What's going on? Aren't you destined for

hell?" He replied: "I had thought I was not worthy enough to enter His kingdom. Now that I have been declared worthy of hell, what wealth I possess! How valuable I am!" O brother, there can be no expectations of proper service from anyone who has not weighed himself in the Scales beyond compare and discovered his own vanity.

A man should possess neither head nor foot:
All should be lost in him, and he in God.

A Sufi saying maintains that the souls of these beloved friends of God were offered to the dogs in a cemetery but not a single dog paid any attention to them.

All who were concerned about themselves held back:
His lovers came tossing their heads to the wind.

A dervish, in intimate converse with God, prayed thus: "O God, be pleased with my love. If this does not please You, be pleased with my dog-like devotion!" The following morning he was walking along the road. A dog, in a trance, addressed him: "O dervish, you have ranked yourself pretty high by wanting to be one of us! What impertinence, since not a single hair of ours has ever been raised in opposition to Him." The dervish threw dust on his head.

Dust, in fact, is itself contemptible and valueless. After a thousand sins and rebellions, imagine its garment of oppression and ignorance! Then what happens? God Most Exalted grants you insight and enables you to see yourself as you are. May God, through His grace and kindness, through the Prophet and his descendants, grant you more knowledge each day so you can know yourself as you are! When you experience that glance and that knowledge, O brother, the pain of faith will appear.

Whoever has obtained the pain of faith
Will be hailed even by Gabriel.
You are master of both worlds, bringing them under foot,
If you bring your desires under control.

Letter 25

THE DESCENT OF CALAMITY AND ADVANCING TOWARDS ACQUIESCENCE

Dearest Brother Shamsuddin, peace! Read this and realize that I have heard that you have returned from Delhi and have had to face many difficulties and that there has been much apprehension in the township on account of the army from Bengal.¹⁴⁸ The means of subsistence were destroyed.¹⁴⁹ The peaceful condition of the township was greatly disturbed.

O brother, you have read that "the world is the abode of calamity and affliction." It is not possible for anybody to take a breath without experiencing calamity or a step without enduring affliction. One is forced to pass one's time in this calamity and affliction-filled world. Whatever is meted out has to be accepted as the lot of a slave, and slavery is the opposite of what people desire. "Opposites do not mix."

Work means not going according to my desire:

This indeed is what it means to be a slave.

O brother, our father Adam, who had the station of paradise and the crown of sinlessness upon his head, as well as the robe of vicegerency upon his body, was not able to take a breath without experiencing calamity or a step without enduring affliction. You and I are his descendants, living today in the abode of calamity and the inn of affliction. We are confounded and tamished with a thousand faults and sins worthy of punishment and torment, so how could we wish to live a moment without enduring affliction, or take a step without experiencing calamity? You have heard stories about the calamities of the prophets and the afflictions of the saints and have also come across similar things in the Quran.

O brother, we receive our food and nourishment from blood as long as we are in our mother's womb. What does a blood-sucker have to do with desire and comfort? Or what does he have to do with gaiety or jollity? Consider the cry of the king of prophets and emperor of the saints: "If only the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad!" Or consider the cry of the most excellent of men¹⁵⁰ after the prophets and apostles: "O that I were a leaf from a tree and were eaten by an ostrich!" There is also the prophetic saying: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its door." He would also cry out and say: "O that I were the menstrual discharge of my mother!" What are you and I, and what can we say?

O brother, the work which has fallen to you and me is not to catch hold of a mountain or ocean; launch an attack on the sky; or grasp a bejewelled earth. Say:

God of the worlds, I am forsaken:
 Sinking in blood I ply my boat in dryness.
 I am left alone along the Way:
 I have no one, and am bereft of resources.
 I have myself, but realize my hopeless state:
 Transform me by means of Your grace.

Letter 26

ABANDONING HABIT AND STRIVING AFTER DEVOTION

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God grant you a long, devoted life and number you among the accepted ones! I repeatedly pray for you. Know for certain that your letters have arrived. Often you have written that nothing has reached you from me. You have even suggested that I might have forgotten you. God forbid that you should think such a thing, for remembrance is a mutual affair, as has been expressed: "Hearts decide together and secrets are shared." As for not writing, however, although it was destined, my verifiable excuse is that, if someone was going in your direction, I was not informed. Until a person comes along and says, "I am going there," I am not able to know. This is why I have not written, not that I have forgotten you.

You had written that, on account of drowsiness, you were losing the latter part of the night and, no matter what you did, you were not able to make it come alive. O

brother, a habit which has taken root over several years and has become firmly entrenched cannot be expected to be changed in less than forty days. A retreat of forty days is needed. You should get up in the latter part of the night and several times repeat your ritual ablutions, as often as you can and, each time, perform two prostrations of prayer. There is good hope that, when you succeed in persevering to this extent without interruption, a habit will be formed, for forty days can make a considerable impact in changing a habit. It is said that, if anybody does not pray at all he should be persuaded to do so for forty days. When he has shown himself to be assiduous for forty days there will be less neglect of prayer. So many weaknesses are involved in the changing of one habit. The condition of other works is like this. The root of the work is none other than these two points: one is a change in behaviour; the second is to alter one's disposition. When anybody takes a step in the right direction in this matter he will advance correctly in all stages and stations and will turn out well. But he who flees with a cry, or makes little effort, from him nothing emerges.

All this has been seen and observed. Moreover, in the observance of the rights of others, a person should proceed maturely according to the conditions and act according to the demands of the Law. He should consider his own manner of proceeding as not consisting in a particular fast, ritual prayer or pilgrimage, but rather in what is done according to a command. All this is proceeding along the Way, even if it is to pick up a handful of dirt and put it somewhere else.

O brother, you should endeavour to please through work, not through Mecca or Medina; mosque or hermitage; solitude or privacy; religion or a particular rite; not self-struggle or asceticism; not in journeying or staying put. It is what the group of those who seek God have said.

If I remember my Beloved in an idol-temple
It would be blameworthy to walk around the Ka'ba.
Bereft of His fragrance, the Ka'ba is but a fire-temple,
While a fire-temple, with the fragrance of union, is my Ka'ba.

At this point wake up and be alert, and don't consider it a trifling matter. You should give full attention to your work, for the various types of knowledge of the whole world are contained within this root. An upright seeker does not see this or that. In so far as he has attained the Object of his desire, something can become a duty of the Way for him as an imperative of his state, no matter how unpleasant the work may be externally, as you have heard from some seekers. It has been expressed thus:

All this knowledge is but a brief compendium:
How to tread the Path to God is something else.

He is persevering no matter whether little or much is bestowed upon him. What is bestowed upon an indigent or burdened person, no matter how little it may be, has its own value and worth. What is little for him is the very thing which is much for others - provided he acts uprightly. I have often written that integrity is the basis of what we do. "Whoever shows perseverance in knocking on a door will undoubtedly have it opened to him." The nature of the work of witnessing and being lost to sight flows from this.¹⁵¹

O brother, there should be no price involved nor should any recompense be sought. If you don't have, you cry out. Take hold of the helplessness, indigence and dependence which is known by the name of servitude and which has been made the sign of all manner of felicity. Open the eyes of expectancy without waiting for His grace, for this is without cause.

One glance from the Friend is joy untold:
I am waiting for the moment that glance comes.

A servant should be stable. He dives into the ocean. If the waves of His grace throw him upon the desired shore, then "he will have gained a notable victory" (Q33:71), while if the crocodile of His anger devours him, "his reward is then incumbent upon God" (Q4:100). In both states there is no question of not finding.

An Israelite who had devoted years to worship was granted a glimpse of God Most Exalted. An angel was sent to him with the command: "Tell him not to be sad that he is unworthy of Me and is destined for hell." When the man heard this he said: "My work is with servitude, not with lordship. He knows this." The angel returned and delivered this message. The reply came: "When My servant has not acted basely, how could I act other than generously?"

If you always desire the wine of His favour
Traverse completely the valley of His wrath.
Until you do the latter, the former won't be yours:
There is no medicine for you except disaster and pain.

Letter 27

RITUAL ABLUTION AND VOLUNTARY NIGHT PRAYER

In very truth, no length of time should pass without performing the ritual ablution¹⁵², even in winter when the water is cold. Each ablution should be performed twice and the thanksgiving prayer¹⁵³ performed. On no account should it be omitted, for those two cycles of prayer would then be lost. This holds true even if in a single night or day ablutions are performed ten or twenty times. As often as possible you should be assiduous in this and consider it as the basis of all works. Among this group it is established that nothing should be eaten or drunk without first performing an ablution. It is related that some holy people have been assiduous in this practice. Each night they got up thirty, forty or fifty times and performed an ablution each time, followed by two cycles of prayer.

I do not know what sort of men they were,
Not for a moment content with their efforts.
Their service unerringly led them to become kings,
The most exalted creatures on the earth.

Each disciple who is steady in this practice is able to stand firm in all situations by virtue of this single work. The work is of this nature. With heart and soul a person should give himself over to it.

Another legacy is that the last watch of the night should be made alive with night prayer¹⁵⁴. Twelve cycles of prayer should be performed with six greetings of peace. In the first one, after the opening chapter of the Quran, recite the Throne Verse:

"God! There is no god except Him, the Living, the Eternal! Slumber does not overtake Him, nor does sleep. What the heavens and the earth contain belong to Him. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all about the affairs of men at present and in the future. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He permits. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him.

There should be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error. He that renounces the idols and puts his faith in God shall grasp the firmest handle that will never break. God is hearing, knowing.

God is the Supporter of those who believe. He leads them from darkness to light. As for the unbelievers, their supporters are false gods who lead them from light to darkness. They are the inmates of hell and shall abide there." (Q2:255-7)

In the second cycle, after the opening chapter of the Quran, recite:

"The Apostle believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They all believe in God and His angels, His books and His messengers. They say: "We have heard and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord! To You shall we all return."

God does not assign a soul more than it can bear. It shall be requited for whatever good and whatever evil it has done. Lord, do not be angry with us if we forget or fall into error. Lord, do not lay on us the burden you laid on those before us. Lord, do not overburden us with more than we can bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and show mercy to us. You are our Protector. Support us against the unbelievers." (Q2:285-6)

Perform the twelve cycles in this fashion. When these prayers are completed, recite the following prayer for forgiveness with earnest supplication, crying out, moaning and lamenting:¹⁵⁵

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

I seek pardon from God, I seek pardon from God, I seek pardon from God and repent of everything that is displeasing to Him.

O God, I ask pardon for all that I did in the past or recently, whether I had tried to hide it or let it be known, and for going beyond the proper limits. You are in front of me and behind me. You are Master of all things.

O God, I seek pardon for all my sins! I return to You. I ask pardon from You for, when I was seeking Your Being, I associated other things with it, which made You angry. I ask pardon from You for, when I had pledged myself to You, nevertheless I broke my promise.

I ask pardon from You for my selfish desires, giving myself the benefit of the doubt in unclear matters, even those that were actually prohibited. I ask pardon from

You for those sins which no one except You knows about or is aware of. Unless You give the command, no pardon is possible, and no other pardon is meaningful except Yours.

I ask pardon for what I have promised to do yet neglected to accomplish, for which I am responsible. Except for You, no being is to be adored. You are pure. I am undoubtedly among those who hurt others.

I ask pardon from You for the blessings You have bestowed upon me and yet I have failed to appreciate them.

O Knower of what is hidden and what is manifest, I ask pardon for all those evil things I have done, either by day or under cover of darkness, either alone or with others, secretly or openly, even though, when I was sinning, You were watching. O Generous and Wise One, O Merciful One, O Great One, You alone are to be adored. You are pure, yet I harm others. I seek forgiveness from You for all the duties which I am obliged to perform, by day or by night, and which I have neglected, either knowingly, mistakenly or unwittingly. I am responsible for them all. Except for You, no being is to be adored. You are pure, yet undoubtedly I cause harm to others.

I seek pardon for all the paths trodden by Muhammad which I, through forgetfulness, unwillingness, laziness or negligence, have not followed. I am responsible for it all. Except for You, no being is to be adored. You are pure, and I am undoubtedly a cause of harm to others. There is no power or strength except in God, Who is exalted and great.

There is a tradition which says: "Whoever sincerely repents of his sins will find that God will free him from all sorrow; provide a solution to every difficulty; 'and provide for him in a manner he could never anticipate' (Q65:3)."

There is another tradition in which the Apostle says: "When a person sins much he should repent much before the God Who sent me, because such repentance consumes sins just as fire consumes wood." Sabit Banani has said: "When this verse came: 'And those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember God and implore forgiveness' (Q3:135), the Devil began to weep."

In the commentary of Imam Zahid¹⁵⁸ it is mentioned that the security of this community consists in two things: one is Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and the other is repentance. One has been taken away, but asking forgiveness remains.

It is related that, when anybody was caught up in his own cares, or experienced difficulty in making ends meet, he would seek help from Khwaja Hasan Basri, who would say: "Seek forgiveness often and remain occupied with this formula: 'There is no god but God' and, after every tenth recitation, recite 'Muhammad is the Apostle of God.' In this fashion, bring to life the last part of the night until dawn, for that is a time of blessings for disciples and for the garment of acceptance for the repentant." It is also related that, in the last part of the night, a herald will announce: "Is there any penitent who needs forgiveness, or inquirer whose question needs an answer, or petitioner whose prayer needs answering?"

Don't distress yourself with a whole lot of extra devotions. The demands of the Law are something else. It has precedence. It should be observed. It is also a

necessary requirement of the Islamic faith. A little lawful work done with perseverance is better than a whole lot of actions not prescribed by the Law, or even involving abandoning it. In all of this it is necessary to count it important to associate with dervishes endowed with knowledge and mystical insight, and to serve seekers, as well as renowned men of faith. You should consider it a gift of God that everyone for whom the acquisition of this wealth has been made easy has a proof that he is one of those called by God, for "He will not sit with the wicked" bears witness to this. You should also take care that you are not entangled and confused by ignorant people and those preoccupied with shape and form. Everyone who studies this matter will find evidence concerning all who push forward the work.

Eschew excess as you would Abu Jahl,
Lest you enter not the world of Muhammad.

Most of the states of a servant should be concerned with private communion with God. Except for important or necessary matters, you should not go outside. Moreover, you should make petition on behalf of the people with a recollected heart and at a time consecrated to God. This same injunction applies to other forms of supplicatory prayer. May God Most Glorious and Exalted effect a correct intention and purpose some day for you, my brother, and open the door to tranquillity, by means of His grace and favour.

Don't expect loyalty from the world:
Day by day, pass manfully beyond it!

Letter 28:

STEADFASTNESS IN DEVOTION AND WORSHIP; THE ACCEPTANCE OF OFFERINGS; AND KEEPING AWAY FROM IGNORANT PEOPLE: MAY GOD THUS MAKE YOU HAPPIER!

O brother, the foundation of this work is steadfastness. Whatever you do should be done in a steadfast fashion. Even if it is trifling, if it is done steadfastly it means very much, whereas something important, if done in an off-hand fashion, is of little consequence.

There is the well-known story of the thief who was strung up on the gallows. Imam Shibli happened to pass by. He placed his blessed turban before him, kissed his feet and walked on.

Whether a man be a commoner or a nobleman,
He should be adept at what he undertakes.

Men of insight are those whose gaze penetrates to the essence of things and does not stop at appearances. If dervishes or those dear to God are given or sent anything then they should certainly accept it. There is no fault in that, for holy men have done so. It would be detrimental, however, if it meant that a person did not accept misfortune. This would not be a proper attitude. Moreover the work should be undertaken under the guidance of somebody so that it might be adorned with

knowledge and proper activity. The person should know well the religious outlook of the group. He should be a master of the fundamental and secondary teaching of this Way and be adept at explaining the words of the sheikhs. He should understand their explanations and hints with regard to the Law of the practice of the Prophet and that of the congregation. He should know the benefits and drawbacks of every activity and the corrupting elements of actions, as well as the correct behaviour of the states of the beginner, the slightly advanced and the mature person.

You should protect yourself from the ignorance of people and those swayed by shape and appearance, and also the impudent and the claimants. You should not get carried away by their ludicrous sayings. You should keep yourself far from their company, for there are many such people in the world.

No matter how easy private communion with God becomes, you should be careful of the people you associate with, yet on condition that the rights of all be respected and no hindrance be found to anyone's right. It will be accounted as gain if you can associate easily with dervishes noted for scholarship, good works and mystical knowledge, and you should consider serving them a cause for rejoicing. Realize that doing this and freely bestowing gifts upon them constitutes your work. May you come to a good end and receive a fair reward!

I am sending a skull-cap along with this.

Letter 29

ESTEEMING LIFE AND NIGHT PRAYER

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God enlighten your heart and number you among the righteous seekers, by His grace and benevolence! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, better known as 'Sharaf.' Read this letter carefully and rest assured, O brother, that your letter reached me. It was found to be full of news of your well-being, O brother, to the praise and glory of the Magnificent One!

It has been written and confirmed that your precious life, as far as is possible, has been given over to devotion and worship, and your valuable time is passed in remembering God and reading the Quran, especially during the last part of the night, together with special prayers. There should be twelve cycles of prayer together with six greetings. In the first cycle, after the Opening Chapter of the Quran, you should read the "Throne Verse" (Q2:255-7). In the second cycle, after the Opening Chapter, verses 285-6 of the second chapter should be recited, for that time is one of blessings for beginners as well as the acquisition of felicity by seekers. This is because petitioners can claim a hearing there, while those who ask are answered and forgiveness is bestowed upon those who seek it, as you have heard: "A solution for the one who prays; and for the one who asks; and for the one who seeks forgiveness."¹⁵⁷

Association with dervishes who are men of learning and of mystical knowledge is accounted a boon, while you should keep yourself far from getting mixed up with ignorant people, even if, externally, they appear friendly. You should always be pure,

and give double thanks, together with ablutions, for, no matter how little devotion there may be, provided it be with perseverance and fixed intention, it is much; whereas without these, even though prolonged, it is of little value. The root of the matter in this work is constancy, even if the work is not very important.

Glory be to God! See with how much perfection, beauty and effort, the command came to the Apostle: "So tread the straight path as you have been commanded" (Q11:112). Ibn Abbas¹⁵⁸ says that no more difficult or demanding verse than this was revealed to the Apostle. From this verse and from the fact that, when the companions saw that several blessed hairs had turned grey, they said: "O Apostle of God, what has made you grow old?" He replied: "The verse from the chapter *Hud*"(i.e. Q11:112))!

The manner of proceeding in this direction has been established by those who have travelled that way.

May your end be good. Peace!

Letter 30

ADVICE AND ABANDONING THE HARMING OF OTHERS

Dearest brother Shamsuddin, may God preserve you from calamities! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines. Read them and become convinced, O brother, that it would not be fitting for someone like you to complain, revile or curse, since you have entered the circle of dervishes and been clothed in their attire. This was a cause for genuine perplexity on my part. How could you have performed an action which was not in consonance with your state? Even if the person was guilty of cruel and oppressive behaviour, as far as possible you should accept gracefully your life and possessions, otherwise others will have to suffer. One should not act in such a way that anything unbecoming or saddening occurs to the dervishes.¹⁵⁹ This verse should be recited: "Say: 'Nothing befalls us except that which God has decreed for us'" (Q9:51). You should also be attentive not to be at enmity with anybody, nor to allow anyone to have any claims upon you.

Bear the burden of his oppression:
Don't say to him, "Be faithful!"

If there is some matter pertaining to the Law, however, then the command has to be fulfilled. For example, it is related that the Apostle was not at all annoyed with anybody over whatever befell him personally, unless dishonour towards God Most Exalted was involved. Take care that restraint be shown in this fashion! If something slips out, forgiveness should be sought, as well as the happiness of those who have been harmed in any way.

It should be realized that this is a great work and an important one. It is a great thing that the right of devotees is more demanding than the right of the Lord, for the right of the Lord is observed by repentance and seeking forgiveness, whereas the right of the creature remains until the person has been satisfied.¹⁶⁰ A martyr who has reached that rank passes beyond himself and intercedes on behalf of others. If the

faintest trace of the right of any creature remains pressing upon him, he does not lift his foot from his court until he has satisfied him.

O brother, the rights of worshippers of the life to come are considerable. A tradition comes to mind which says: "If somebody were to reduce the Ka`ba - the focus of the prayers of the faithful - to rubble and burn it, a believer would not be saddened unless there were an obligation of the Law involved."

Letter 31

THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING THE LETTERS SENT TO THE DISCIPLE FROM THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Brother Shamsuddin, may disciples benefit greatly from God's blessing! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as Sharaf! Study them carefully and rest assured that it has reached me that you, Shamsuddin, have said: "I am not able to write anything on account of bashfulness. If you write something and send it to me, I shall be able to write."

What is this bashfulness? Write everything about your state and your work whenever you have the opportunity to do so. The understanding prevailing in this group is that a disciple should not conceal anything he does from his spiritual guide, no matter how shameful it might be. If a sick person does not explain his symptoms how can the physician prescribe a remedy? If his symptoms are different from what he says, how can he prescribe any medicine? If he takes some action the person still will not regain his health. Everything that applies to the relationship between a sick person and his physician applies similarly to that of a disciple and his spiritual guide, without any distinction.

The root of the matter is found in the story of Ma'iz. When that affair befell him he came to the Apostle and said: "O Apostle of God, I have committed adultery. Make me clean!" This type of pain is required in order to bring a disciple low so that he might become a righteous seeker. Once this aim has been made clear, bashfulness and shame would be harmful for a disciple and would be an obstacle.

Because of your seeking and restlessness of heart, several letters have already been written. The idea was to send them separately. My friends all came to me saying: "Let us make a collection of them! Let us make copies of all of them. Then let them be sent." On account of this there has been a delay. God willing, the rest of the letters will be sent afterwards. They will form a book. May it all turn out for the best!¹⁶¹

Letter 32

PERSEVERING IN EJACULATORY PRAYERS AND IN DAILY TASKS

Brother, your letter arrived. It contained good news. May God be praised for that! It is necessary to persevere in ejaculatory prayers and daily duties. In no

circumstances should there be any falling short or slackening off along that Path. Make good use of your time in studying the books of the sheikhs and the *Letters*.¹⁶² Be very careful indeed! A holy man was asked: "We are unable to perform those works which the holy men and sheikhs have performed. What profit is there for us in reading their words and studying their books?" He replied: "The words of the sheikhs are God's army upon the face of the earth. If the reader is a man, he will become lion-hearted. If he is not a man, he will become one."¹⁶³

A holy man was asked: "If an age arrives when we do not find any outstanding holy men, what should we do?" He replied: "Every day a person should read a portion of their writings or books."

O brother, everyone who is alive lives in the shade of their spiritual riches or has contact with their words. Anybody who has neither form of contact is dead and in the grip of his infidel soul. He cannot occupy himself with the prayers and duties of a disciple unless he opposes his infidel soul. This is the fountain-head of all forms of worship, just as agreeing with one's infidel soul is equivalent to idol-worship. "The selfish soul is the great idol." Don't you see that, if the Devil had not given in to his selfish soul he would not have incurred the burden of his curse, and if Pharaoh had not heeded his selfish soul he would not have laid claim to divinity? Thus it is that the members of this group do not seek to analyse their actions,¹⁶⁴ for that is what the selfish soul craves for and takes pleasure in. The infidel soul is of such a nature that, if you spend a hundred years subduing it by raining various forms of chastisement upon it, yet give in once to its promptings, it will dash the whole of your Islam to the ground. Thus Imam Abu Ali Rudbari¹⁶⁵ has said that when a Sufi, after five days, says, "I am hungry," then it will be necessary to tell him to go to the bazaar and get something to eat. O brother, no treasure is acquired without sorrow.

Unless you first experience a melting away,
You have no chance of being cherished.

As far as possible the disciple should himself embrace the struggle with his selfish soul, imposing different kinds of hunger and thirst upon it, for nothing makes the infidel soul as malleable and tractable in all its activities as does hunger and thirst, for these two forms of chastisement can close for him the seven doors of hell.

I keep my friend for ever hungry
So that my soul may satisfy me fully.¹⁶⁶

Letter 33 **IN QUEST OF GOD AND HIS LOVE**

Written to Qazi Zahid.¹⁶⁷ Keep steadfastness purified of both worlds! Consider whatever comes under the influence of 'Bel' as having the mark of newness upon it and could turn out to be an idol or a Brahminical thread on your path.¹⁶⁸ This agrees with the mystic who said:

Without union with You, of what use is my soul?

Without Your beauty, of what use is the world?

That seeker of blameless conduct, Malik Dinar,¹⁶⁹ while communing with God used to say: "O God, when You lead me into paradise and say, 'I am pleased with you,' O Master, that will be enough. Turn me into dust and grant paradise to those who seek it."

That intoxicated man of God, Ain ul-Quzat Hamadani, used to say: "There is a complete difference between eating and drinking here, and eating and drinking there."

Die of thirst for Him, if you are still alive:

Become dust at this door, if you are a slave.

Is it possible that your discerning glance has not fallen upon this page: "I have prepared for my devout seekers what the eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man?"¹⁷⁰ What place is there for bread and water, O faint-hearted one?

O brother, there are very many seekers after blessings and favours in this world, but those who seek the Bestower of blessings and favours are as rare as the philosopher's stone. Such a person possesses this wealth: "O David, when you see someone who seeks Me, become his servant!" Glory be to God for the fact that, when David was a servant, the realm and the firmament formed a covering over him. What news did men and jinn have about him?

O brother, as long as duality enters the sight of seekers, undoubtedly they are still the squint-eyed ones of the age, as they see double.¹⁷¹

O brother, love leads a servant to God.¹⁷² In this sense it has come to be regarded as necessary for the Way. "There is no guide greater than love."

Simply become a disciple with love as your master!

Account life as love and you will recognize death as the absence of love. One beloved of God has said that more than 100,000 prophets have been sent to mankind. Men who were estranged from Him showed no sign of recognition. O foolish ones! If a particle of love from the Lord himself had been sent, the whole world would have recognized Him. Thus it is said: "Love is the Path; the face of the Beloved is paradise; while separation is hell and torment."

O brother, the mount of love is such that in one stride it escapes from both worlds and gallops around in Him who abides nowhere.

The seeker should be a person who attracts a burden in order to become a burden upon the Desired One.¹⁷³ Anyone who traverses this Path is in danger of death.¹⁷⁴ This wealth is thus not easy for a seeker to acquire. It is difficult, yet the Sought One is not far from the seeker: "And He is with you, wherever you are." The seeker is far from Him because he is veiled by his own self.¹⁷⁵ When you emerge from your preoccupation with thinking about your own being you will see that you are gazing at the Sought One.

O brother, the secret of what troubled hearts are yearning and longing for is contained in this saying: "With God Most Exalted there is 'You,' but no 'me' or 'other.'"

You don't become Him but, if you try hard,
You will reach the stage when 'you' depart.

"The lover gets lost in the command of the Beloved." As long as he lives his condition is such that, when he meditates upon His beauty, he trembles with joy, and when he considers His majesty, a cry escapes him. Love attracts fire, and the hearts of lovers are furnaces. If they exhale, the world will catch fire, but if they inhale, they themselves will be burnt.

A long as you have 'self' you see everything as added:
When 'self' passes away, you will see everything as One.¹⁷⁶

Letter 34

THE SUBLIMITY OF STEADFASTNESS

To the afore-mentioned Qazi Zahid. Your letter reached me. I have read it carefully and ascertained the contents. You should keep your mind at peace and set about your work manfully. You should not pay attention to what you see or hear. Yahya Mu'az Razi¹⁷⁷ wrote to the king of mystics¹⁷⁸ that there was a person who had tasted a drop and become thoroughly intoxicated. The king of mystics replied that there was a person who had swallowed the ocean and cried out, "Is there any more?"

For the drop which is lost in the Ocean
Both worlds, without God, are but wages.
In love, as long as there is another,
There is an idol within the Ka'ba.

O brother, a person who is steadfast in his quest for God is not satisfied with this world or the next. What happens from simply hearing or seeing things? Whatever he wants, happens; whatever blessing he desires is obtained. Anyone who would exchange the Giver for the gift is an impostor and idol-worshipper. Beware of letting such things occupy your attention. You should be stout-hearted, for a seeker or disciple who lacks steadfastness has virtually nothing.

The foundation of this endeavour consists of two things: the first is steadfastness, while the second is poverty. In spite of all the devotion and worship of the entire world, and in spite of every perfection in poverty, anyone who goes back to a perfection and becomes filled with blessings is a person of limited aspirations. He will not be numbered among the intrepid.¹⁷⁹ He is fittingly preoccupied with his belly. What does he have to do with that saying?

Whoever steps forward boldly has become a man:
His eminence now equals that of the sun.
Whoever has entered manfully upon this Way
Becomes a king if he takes to begging.

O brother, the continual prayer of the seeker is this: "Whether I possess much or am perishing, I seek refuge in God." You should be diligent in your work and ensure that there is no slackening in your effort. Everything else is child's play or the dreams of people who are slumbering.

When your every memory is of the Master,
You will be like Majnun, for whom all is Laila.

It occurred to me that no letter had reached me from you for several days. Your letter then arrived. It contains flattering references about me. Anyone who writes such things does not please me but, since it is you who have written, I had to read it and will point out what is commendable or blameworthy in it. It is your duty also to write whatever happens, whether it be something trifling or important, and to occupy yourself, night and day, with the work in hand. God willing the Way will be revealed to you; the expanse of Oneness will appear; and this world and the next will be as nothing in your sight.

If this world or the next is kept in view by a person of high resolve, a cry would escape from him. Do you know what is meant by, "In 18,000 worlds a single group has been created consisting of men of high resolve?" To you has been granted what has not been told to any other group. "I have placed in him some of My Spirit," while ordinary people were told, "This is a profound secret." Nobody is bold enough to write about this.

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
They strive to obliterate 'self' from their hearts.
At every breath they imbibe wine offered by the Friend:
They play with their heads, yet conceal the divine secret.

There was one who revealed the secret of love.¹⁸⁰ He was borne off to the zealous gallows for having done so. He spoke thus:

Be careful not to speak before a multitude
If you are a genuine lover with secrets.
Recall that, intoxicated with love,
Hallaj spoke up - and went to the gallows!

Letter 35

ABANDONING THE SUGGESTIONS OF THE SELFISH SOUL

To the afore-mentioned Zahid.¹⁸¹ Brother, your letter reached me. It threw light on the matter. Be careful not to allow your attention to wander towards anything for any reason. If all the blessings of this world and the next are brought before you, don't even look at them out of the corner of your eye! Consider them an idol on your path. Recite: "There is no god but God." Whatever is under the sway of the creative 'Be!' will, like a trial, cease to exist. "Except God" will have proved its worth.

The world of love does not accept dualism:
What sort of talk is this about "You are?"
Since you have access to the divine threshold,
Don't ask Him for anything: ask for Him!

One cannot escape from seeing and hearing things even in seclusion, but it is necessary not to pay attention to them. You should be brisk in fulfilling your duties and not get entrapped by the promptings of your selfish soul. You should not talk with

it, for nobody can discuss matters with his selfish soul. Cry out to the honoured Lord, saying:

Give me a heart - and see how bold I become!
Call me Your fox - and see a lion approaching!

Become absorbed in thinking about such things so that the hints and suggestions of your selfish soul may find no entrance!

O brother, the suggestions of your selfish soul constitute a veritable calamity. The misfortunes that befall people who seek private communion with God stem from it. I have said that it is endowed with knowledge and understanding. The ignorant say that it is a miracle. We have heard thus. We were told so today. This calamity will inevitably occur unless it is obviated by the remembrance of God. The more a person's heart is occupied with this remembrance the less the danger becomes. It subsides when the light of remembrance has appeared and a person's heart has become illumined. Therefore a disciple should show himself so diligent in remembering God that it will pass from his lips to his heart. This will become so satisfied that there will be no room left for the suggestions of the selfish soul.

Do away with whatever pertains to Path or opinion
So that your heart may become the abode of God.

God willing, much will be bestowed upon you and this consolation will not constrict your heart, nor will it be broken by the trickery of Satan. Praise be to God that you have applied yourself to the work of men. Give thanks to Him and play the man. All other activities should be set aside.

What is poverty? It is seeking the Way after losing it,
And abandoning ambition in this world and the next.
Love's ransom is a spirit of holiness:
Don't seek to pick up love along the way!
If you are seeking to fulfil the command,
Don't seek love except within your soul!

Letter 36

MAKING AN EFFORT IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS AND NOT GETTING DISCOURAGED

My brother Zahid, the peace of God be with you! Rest assured that your letter reached me. More light has been thrown on the topic. There should be no sloth in this matter. Rather, all trials and difficulties should be borne patiently.

There is no Way bereft of trials and troubles:
There is no comet without a tail.

O brother, the more trials and difficulties abound, the more the selfish soul is put on the defence. The more this happens, the more worthwhile the work a person can do. You should be prompt in whatever you undertake. This one foolish thing is

good for ascertaining to what extent your selfish soul still has a grip over you. Otherwise, what was the reason for what took place?

His burden is whatever his Friend has bestowed upon him:
Apart from His work, what other occupation does he have?

In short, don't be vexed! Accept it as a fact that, since you have seen the extent of your selfish soul, you are thereby enabled to advance in your task, for everything that exists can serve as a preparation for the work itself. The more intensive the preparation, the greater the work. When spiritual guides command their disciples to do something they do so for the sake of preparing them.

When you tackle the work night and day,
The Way of seeking will swiftly be revealed to you.

Letter 37

TAKING A CLOSE LOOK AT THE FAULTS OF THE SELFISH SOUL

Your¹⁸² letter reached me and was carefully perused. Let your mind be at peace and your heart firm. Remain resolute, for the grace and favour of God are at hand. Grace makes all difficult things easy, while it is the divine favour that enables a person to attain what he desires, for here work is without a cause.¹⁸³ What was the devotion or worship of the Companions of the Cave?¹⁸⁴ And what did Pharaoh's magicians have to do with struggle with self or asceticism? In an hour they were raised aloft. In spite of all this, however, holy men have said: "Be careful not to break your heart! Be occupied with your work, for work begets work."

Whoever wants this work to be without pain
Will never taste anything from the tree of love.

O brother, no matter how much is made clear to you in the privacy of your devotions, your gaze should remain on the faults of your selfish soul as though on a Brahminical thread or a hidden idol! This itself is something good. One of the signs of the fortunate ones is that they acquire enough insight to perceive the faults of their actions; the calamitous effects of their selfish souls; and the cunning of Satan. When a disciple has reached this stage he becomes firmly established in his own nature, but it takes a disciple years to reach this point. As far as you are concerned, my brother, since your activities are blessed by God, years and months have no meaning.

A child in a cradle is raised to prophethood
And made more mature than all his elders.

There was a delay at the afternoon prayer. I had no time to write. The intention of a person who is stout-hearted, and his considered opinion, is not to fall into these discussions,¹⁸⁵ for discussions distract a person from his work. In this situation, while the activity of discussing some point of knowledge is good in itself, nevertheless a disciple has another task before him. In relation to this work discussions would be a veil for him.

All of this knowledge of the body is but a trifle:
 Knowledge of how to tread the Path to God is something else.
 A great talker fills pages with writing:
 How can this make a clouded heart shine like the moon?
 Take care to remain committed to your work! Realize that my thoughts are with you. Peace!

Letter 38

UTILIZING LEISURE TIME

Sent to Qazi Zahid. O brother, your letter reached me. I studied it carefully. O brother, keep your wits about you! For His seekers every night is a Night of Power, every day is a Feast Day, and every month is the month of Ramazan. If you are for Him, everything is yours, for "Whoever has the Lord possesses everything."

For others, the promise of union refers to tomorrow:
 For lovers, the promise of union is operative now.

O brother, I have been constantly thinking about you these recent evenings. Be so kind as to remember me also in your valuable prayers - poor and indigent as I am - for "The prayer of a Muslim for his brother is not without effect on the Hidden One." This interpretation, along with an example, comes from holy men. All is to be borne with meekness and humility, just as it is related that the Messenger, when he used to see Hilal, would say, "O Hilal, pray for me!"

Know for certain that the lions of the hunt
 Seek friendship with ants along this Way.

Anyone who sees himself as something, or thinks that he is something, is looking at himself, not at God, and whoever sees himself and says, "I am better than he" (Q7:12),¹⁸⁶ even though he be the teacher of angels, the mark of the Devil's curse is imprinted on his brow.

Letter 39

FEAR OF ONE'S END, AND PERSONAL PENURY

To Qazi Zahid.
 Alas, I have passed my whole life in the lane of idols,
 For I have remained like an old Brahmin in a temple!

O brother, how can a person who is caught up in lamenting over his own plight, and whose situation has become so miserable that he says,

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
 I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer,

think of somebody else?¹⁸⁷ What can he say or write to another person? Whoever said the following spoke correctly:

Wound your soul with the memory of past cruelties
And, out of shame, pour salt on the wound!

It is clear that you have become somewhat dejected. Here also some of those who are close to me are feeling low and complaining. You are not the only one in this condition! O brother, my life is over. Death has arrived.¹⁸⁸ The final journey lies before me. I have been seized by astonishment about the Angel of Death's arriving and saying: "O God, shall I lay hold of the soul of this servant, whether he be in a laudable or reprehensible state?" I do not know what reply will be possible at that moment. How could anyone who experiences this astonishment be preoccupied with self?

I don't know what the exiled past is:
I don't know what the determined end is.
My evil turned to good when You accepted me:
My good turned to evil when You possessed me.¹⁸⁹

O brother, the work is extremely difficult. It is not such that everyone who thinks, speaks or hears about it is able to accomplish it.

If you see the wretchedness of what you do, flee!
Wipe out the money advanced as your worth and value.

A mystic was caught up in the throes of death. People said to him: "Do you have any wish that we could fulfil?" He replied: "Yes, nothingness! I want non-existence."

Whoever seeks to fathom this sublime secret
Needs a hundred lifetimes, not merely one.
Whoever is confronted with this state of things
Is helpless, even with a hundred hearts!

Anyone whose wealth consists of "If the faith of Abu Bakr is compared with that of my community, his is preferable" says: "O that I were a leaf on a tree so that I might be eaten by a goat!" And the person whose stage is, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate," says: "O that I were the menstrual flow of my mother!" In this vein someone has said:

O that my mother had never given me birth
And my infidel soul had never come to be!
O that my name had never been
And I had never known activity or rest!

These are the great ones of the world and leaders of the Islamic faith. What can anyone who was born in an idol-temple, brought up there and spent his whole life worshipping the idol of his selfish soul, say? What would his condition be? Mercy be upon the pure one who said:

My forehead is calloused with worshipping idols:
How long can I pass myself off as a Muslim?

Another has said:

O Brahmin, let me in, my Islam has been rejected:
Can one like me find no place, even before an idol?

O brother, this work is without cause. "He accepted the one He accepted, without cause."

He entrusts the kingdom to a shepherd:
He confers favours on an entire world.

He rejects the one He rejects, without cause.

In spite of a hundred thousand years of devotion,
He keeps the noose of the curse about my neck.¹⁹⁰

Just as a person, even though laden with the sins and offences of the whole world, is not without hope; so too, if adorned with the devotion and worship of the whole world, he still has no security.

The perplexed are utterly confused by His work:
You are similarly innocent of His secrets.
Bestir yourself finally from the sleep of desire:
Briefly come to your senses, O desire-swayed one!

Nobody has knowledge of what lies concealed behind the veil of the divine will, namely, whether he is among the rejected or the accepted ones. The teacher of the angels thought he was among the latter. From behind the veil of the divine will was suddenly heard: "A curse upon you until the Day of Judgement!" That rejected one threw dust on his head and said:

In both worlds there is no place from top to bottom
Where I have not prostrated myself in worship.
I who put the curse upon the Devil
Have thanked myself for this favour.
Suddenly a flood of effort was required:
It was a night of blood when that curse arrived.
From head to toe I was filled with grief:
I became a warning for all regions.
What did I know, for I am a stranger:
They are all intelligent: I am a madman.

If this is one's state - and the work is like this - who feels secure and at rest, and who can be satisfied with eating and sleeping? Moreover, who has intelligence and awareness? It is related that the Apostle once said to Gabriel: "My brother, what is your state in the heavenly court?" He replied: "O Apostle, since one of us was rejected, nobody feels secure and at rest!"

If you enter this Ocean for but a moment
You will see a world to inflame your soul.
It is difficult to manage the fear of this Way:
It fills the hearts of a hundred worlds with terror.
The closer you get, the more astounded you become:
It is much easier to be involved in earthly tasks.

Letter 40

THE MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE INTELLECT¹⁹¹

To Maulana Kamaluddin. The peace, mercy and blessing of God be upon you! A good friend, the son of a religious-minded man from Delhi, went to the town of Santus on business. On his way back he visited me, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as Sharaf. He told me he had visited the revered teacher, Maulana Kamaluddin, who had said that a certain person (namely the writer of several letters concerning the knowledge of the Path and what it means to be a dervish) had written one letter about the mystical knowledge of the Lord¹⁹² and had written therein that the intellect is not the cause of mystical knowledge. He wanted to know how this could be so. Several times the Maulana voiced his disagreement.

When I¹⁹³ heard this I said: "God knows best, yet the esteemed Maulana must certainly know about the saying that comes from the Great Imam.¹⁹⁴ A similar opinion is found therein. Moreover, the saying has an explanation. Perhaps the esteemed Maulana does not know about it. It is known to scholars. There is nothing astonishing about it."

That friend inquired: "What saying is that?" I replied that it is related that the Great Imam said: "If God had not sent an apostle, those endowed with intellect would have had to attain the knowledge¹⁹⁵ of Him by means of their intellect." Theologians have interpreted this saying thus: "It is incumbent upon those endowed with intellect to argue from signs to knowledge, not to full mystical knowledge,¹⁹⁶ as proved by the saying of the Most Exalted: 'We never punish until We have sent an apostle' (Q17:15)." What is the result? When someone endowed with intellect, like a lofty mountain, does not argue from signs yet lives his life in ignorance of faith and unbelief, dies, he will be taken to task on the Day of Resurrection, not for abandoning faith, but for abandoning argumentation. This whole discussion is described in the *Tamhidat* (Apology) of Abu Shakur Salami¹⁹⁷ and also in the Commentary of Imam Zahid¹⁹⁸ on the 29th chapter of the Quran entitled, "The Spider," if anyone wants to study the matter therein.

As for the Mutazilites, however, a person would be taken to task for abandoning the faith, just like other unbelievers because, as far as they are concerned, intellect is the cause of mystical knowledge and the necessity of faith rests upon it alone, not on "God Most Exalted is the Necessary One, while the intellect is only the instrument of praise." The fountain-head of all the mystics, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, said: "Except for God, what guides us?" He did not say: "Except for the intellect, what guides us?"

Without His anointing, could the intellect recognize Him?
It would remain ignorant about its God.
It is not by way of intellect, thinking or desire:
Without God's help, no one can know God.

Thus it is that holy men have written: "Holy is the One Who cannot be known unless He makes Himself known."

The whole intellect is but a word from His notebook:
 The entire selfish soul is only a guard at His door.

The renowned Righteous One said at this stage: "Holy is the One who has not shown the people a way to know Him except that of knowing Him in helplessness."

My dear friend, the unfortunate intellect does not know who or what it is. How can it understand the Lord - exalted be His Glory - unless He makes Himself known? "One who does not know himself is surely not capable of knowing another."

O you who are incapable of knowing yourself,
 How could you possibly know God?
 Since you are helpless in your own world
 How can you become a knower of God Omnipotent?

Umar Khattab said: "I know my Lord by means of my Lord."

No one can get to know Him of himself:
 His essence can be known only through itself.
 With the demands of intellect, soul and desire,
 How can there be knowledge of God Omnipotent?

In this life the intellect is a cause and an instrument for acquiring mystical knowledge. For this reason, attributing mystical knowledge to the intellect is allowed, just as this knowledge can be attributed to an intelligent person. Also, for the reason that, if the intellect was the cause of mystical knowledge, it would necessarily mean that all those endowed with intellect were equal in mystical knowledge, and all God's servants would find the Way to God without proof or signs. Since believers and non-believers are equal in intellectual prowess, it means the believers found the Way while the unbelievers did not. Yet there are many unbelievers who are more intelligent than a hundred thousand believers. They settle worldly affairs in an hour but find no trace of the Way to God. There are also many believers who are not greatly endowed intellectually. They don't know how to cope with worldly matters or the Way, yet they have a mastery of the minutiae of the mystical knowledge of God. Moreover there are some things about which God Most Exalted has informed us which remain incomprehensible for them. They recognize God, however, since the Quran says:¹⁹⁹ "I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of God" (Q27:24).

It is related that the hoopoo bird said to Solomon: "I found Bilqis²⁰⁰ and her people prostrating themselves before the sun instead of God." If the bird did not know God, how could it understand whom they were worshipping? Moreover it is commonly accepted that a bird is not endowed with an intellect. If the intellect were the cause of mystical knowledge then such knowledge would be impossible for a creature not endowed with intellect.²⁰¹ There are many stories in this vein. In addition the Lord has said to us: "Can the dead man whom We have raised to life..." (Q6:122)? Raising a person's heart to a life of faith is itself as miraculous a deed as is bringing a dead person back to life - a veritable impossibility! Producing a life of faith in a person's heart is in a similar category, for this is a greater action than the former. In another place it is said: "Is he whose breast God has opened up to Islam..." (Q39:22). Opening up one's heart of itself causes an increase with respect to friendship while, on the

other hand, closing one's heart of itself leads to an increase in enmity. It has been said: "God has put a seal upon their hearts..." (Q2:7). Since opening and closing, by themselves, produce an increase, it would be foolish to think that there would be any other than He who opens or shuts.

Whatever He manifests to anyone is pure gift:
 But if He does not do so, it is all orders and commands.
 No heart has access to His substance:
 Neither soul nor intellect is aware of His perfection

O brother, who can close what He opens, or who can open what He closes?
 "And God was predominant in his affair." (Q12:21)²⁰²

Heart and mind are astonished at His glory:
 Body and soul are dumbfounded at His beauty.
 The grandeur of His essence leaves the mind in a whirl:
 Know that knowledge of its height and depth is limited.

It is related in some accounts that the Lord Most Exalted has bestowed four kinds of knowledge upon all animals: they know their Creator, their enemies, their food and their mates. The fifth type of knowledge is specific to man. It is a knowledge which includes a fear of becoming dejected, to put the matter in a nutshell.

My hope is that, after studying what has been written herein, no confusion may remain in your mind. May God be your guide along the Road to salvation! The mercy of God be upon those who act justly! Peace!

Letter 41 **LOVE²⁰³**

Addressed to the aforementioned Qazi Kamaluddin, from Sharaf Maneri. Greetings and prayerful best wishes! My sister's son²⁰⁴ has arrived. He spoke about love. Perhaps there had been some discussion about it at your place. O brother, it has been said that love brings a servant to God. In this sense love is considered as obligatory for the Way. Learn about life from love, and account the absence of love as death.

For Majnun, love is something else: his present state is
 That Islam is the religion of Laila: all else is error!

It is said that the hell of lovers is the love of God.²⁰⁵ Thus the more a heart is set on fire, the more precious it is.

Men leave dust behind them in this world:
 Ashes remain the only trace of lovers!

It has been expressed thus: "Love refers to the Path; vision applies to paradise; separation means hell and its torments."

Those intoxicated from the cup of love
 Are drunk with the wine of "Am I not?"²⁰⁶

Those who die entirely to their own being
Are friends in the world of love.

Those who are initiated into the secret of love
Tremble while experiencing the divine caresses.

The messengers of God left no legacy of gold or silver. What they did possess came down to those whose hearts were inflamed. Today they are refreshed thereby.

When love is wholly my friend and companion
All grief is but a gulp from my cup.
Flee far from your intellect for, in the world of love,
It too is the slave of my unhinged heart.

It is said that love is a fire which consumes whatever it touches and that the hearts of lovers are dormant fire-temples. If even a particle of that fire were to fall outside both this world and the next would be consumed. Thus it is said that the whole world is tormented by the fire of hell, and hell itself by the fire in the hearts of lovers. This seems impossible to those who are taken up with external forms and appearances.

Unless you experience the pain of this work
You won't be able to hear the story of this pain.
Conveying what the Eternal Lover is like
Is better than producing descriptions or commentaries.

Thus a wise man, overcome by ecstasy and in intimate converse with God, said: "My God, in your kindness pass me by! I shall pass through hell so that all the estranged might find release."

It would be a fault for an intellectual to say this:
But if a madman or a lover says it, it will pass.
Whoever is as agitated as the ocean
Will utter words of madness when he speaks.
When an impudent word escapes his lips
Don't reject him as a madman!

If you were to pour out oceans upon their inner fire, they would all burst into flame. You should consider external fire wholly as fuel for their internal fire, as a madman said:

The man whose heart is not the receptacle of secrets
Has nothing to do with love in either world.
Asceticism deals with the reality of preaching and prayer:
In love there is naught save wine and sacred thread.

O brother, if you can acquire a particle of love today, do so, for this quality will accompany you to the grave: "On that day goods and sons will be of no avail. Only he who comes to God with a sincere heart will be secure."

I shall carry a lock of your hair to the grave
So that it may shade my head on Judgement Day.

This will become easy for you the very moment you empty your heart of the love of anything other than God, no matter what it may be, even if it be paradise filled with comforts and blessings.

A house is either a place for furniture or for the remembrance of a friend.

When the heart - which is the house of God - is cleansed of other images, what is promised for others tomorrow becomes a reality today.

Anyone for whom the Sun already shines
Has found here what is promised there.

A person needs an eye in order to see, but for worldly and sensual people, how can this seeing take place?

Seek the eye which enables your soul to see:
Seek eternal vision from God Himself.

The point of this whole exposition is the purification of the heart from other than He. You must have heard that a portion of the heart of the Friend of God inclined towards his son.²⁰⁷ He had a dream in which he was instructed to sacrifice his son. When he expelled the love of his son from his heart, a command came: "There will be no need to cut the throat of the innocent lad for My sake. What was needed was the excision of the love for another from your heart. Since your heart is now as it should be, let the boy go."²⁰⁸

Night and day I am occupied with your work:
I will break your ties with whatever you do.²⁰⁹

A lover should be jealous. He does not want to see his friend with anyone else. Increase and harm pertain to love: the stronger the love, the more intense the jealousy.

Make people blind on the Day of Resurrection,
But grant me alone clear, eternal vision,
So that none might see You but me alone,
And that I might see You without a rival.

Any heart which has place for anyone except God is ruined. If it is not fitting for you or me to have a broken-down house, how could it be fitting for God to have one? One cannot trample on a royal carpet with dirty feet, so how would it be possible to get close to God with an unbecoming secret?

There is no room for a particle along with love:
No haughty person is a man of friendship.

"God does not look at your outward appearance, nor at your works, but at your hearts." External appearance and works are not seen by God, but that refined point, known as the heart, is what is seen by Him.

Say to the inhabitants of both worlds:
"What can I do? You don't know your own worth."

Thus it is said that, when a person becomes acquainted with the Path "a shirt would be like a cloak for him."²¹⁰

Men devoted to the Path are not after clothing:
Prepare to serve the King and thus become a Sufi.

Know for certain that whatever the heart is attached to in this life is what it will be attached to in the next. The very same thing will appear before it.

Whatever occupies your thoughts in this world
Will remain your path and union for all eternity.

If in this life a person's heart is attached to this world so that it becomes the object of his desire and quest then, after death, it will be the world which will fill his vision. Similarly, anyone whose heart is given over to beautiful damsels, palaces and purifying wine will, after death, find paradise brought forward to fill his vision. If in this life a person's heart is attached to God and its whole aim and quest is God - may He be glorified and exalted - then, after death, the veil will be removed and He will reveal His very own beauty.

As long as heaven and hell are found along the Way
How can your soul become aware of this secret?
When you have extricated yourself from both,
The dawn of this Wealth will brighten into day.

God Most Exalted said: "Some of them harm themselves; some of them are lukewarm; and some of them outstrip others in good deeds" (Q35:32). Men are divided into three categories: the oppressors, the lukewarm and those advanced in doing good. Those who harm themselves are the people who worship God yet who hanker after and yearn for this world. This leads to utter destruction.

You drove out your soul for the sake of bread:
You have given away your faith for bodily desires.

The lukewarm are those who worship God yet they really want beautiful damsels and palaces. The members of this group say that, no matter how exalted this stage is, nevertheless whatever has been made in paradise is all pleasure and connected with the senses. Brute beasts can share in all these. For man - the high-point of creation and the manifestation of the divine secret - to sink to what he shares with the wild beasts would indicate vileness, not steadfastness!

Neither hell nor heaven has any value there:
The things you know would be a veil over Me.

Those outstanding for good works are the people who worship God and yearn and strive for the pure essence of God Most Exalted. As you have just heard, men of God are different and their religion is different. Whoever wrote the following has expressed it well:

The world is for the emperors of India and China:
Praise is for angels and purity for men.
Hell is for the wicked, paradise for the good:
My Beloved is for me, and I am for Him.

Letter 42

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE FRIENDS OF GOD MOST EXALTED

Addressed to the aforementioned Maulana Kamaluddin. My sister's son, Zainuddin, delivered your letter to me. I read it carefully. It described how eager you were to find an opportunity to meet me. This flowed from your love and affection for me. All the hearts of lovers are inflamed by love. It has also shattered the lives of all those who yearn, as one of them has said: "Desire depends on the quality of love."

Every heart that is sorely tried by love becomes
A mine filled with sorrow, effort and calamity.
The heart becomes a stranger to pleasure
When acquainted with the sorrow of love.

Lovers see it as incumbent upon themselves to be very grateful for these things.²¹¹ Moreover they conceive the joy of the next life in these terms, for the love and yearning of this group are not of negligible value, nor is every heart capable of receiving this blessing.

How can wine be given to pious men in the lane of love?
How can strangers be given a drink from desire's cup?
How can the robe of the elect be given to commoners
Unless love's gallows are set up in the market place?

He who is the leader of the world and upon whose head was placed the crown of "If you had not been, why should I have created the heavens?"²¹² prayed night and day in this fashion: "O God, make me live as a poor man, and my community too, and raise me up amidst the multitude of the poor!" Glory be to God! If he said, "Keep them with me in life and in death, and make them rise from the dead with me," what need would there be for further wealth? What would it be like, then, if the Lord says about Muhammad: "Keep him with the poor in life and in death, and raise him from the dead along with them!" Thus it can be seen what sort of group this is, and how precious the love of its members is. It would be a great boon if this wealth were rendered easy for heart and soul.

What should I do with my life? Offer it to You?
When I am close to You, I feel no danger.
A recluse sits contentedly in his cell:
He is blind, knowing naught of Your beauty.

O brother, I congratulate you on your love for them and the eagerness you have for them. Night and day, with heart and soul, through your children and wife, seek to do more. Be sincere in your efforts, not a pretender, for there are many who pretend to love this group. Consider this as fundamental.

If I am good they will accept me as their own:
But if I am bad, forgive me on account of them.

According to the impulse of love, each lover is with his beloved, even if, as far

as personality and essence are concerned, he is in the west or the east. If the distance is considerable, don't be afraid, for "there is no distance with love." Abul Hasan Kharraqani said: "Men hold conflicting opinions about whether, in the next life, they will see or not."²¹³ Abul Hasan purchases goods with cash. It would be impossible to sell on credit. "Waiting is a violent death."

Whoever is warmed by the Sun here
Already receives what has been promised there.

When lovers hear this word, "And God is with you," they possess many thousands of paradeses.

You are in fact already within my soul:
Having found You, why should I seek further?
Mahmud²¹⁴ had turned to dust yet still
His heart is fixed on Ayaz's love-filled glance.

Once an Arab came to Medina and said: "O Apostle of God, I consider you to be a close friend of mine, but I live a long way from Medina. What advice do you have for me?" He replied: "A man associates with the one he loves." In other words, according to the impulse of love, everyone is with his friend, no matter how far away a person may be in his bodily essence. It is said that, until Islam made its appearance, there was no question of believers' experiencing this joy. It has become manifest after hearing this tradition. All those inflamed by the fire of His love live their present lives on the basis of this tradition.

Whoever is aware of Him in this life
Acquires light of Him from His brilliance.
Everyone enthralled by the secret of love
Lives in eternal intimacy with Him.

Wise men have related how it was said to seekers: "He is seated next to Me, yet between Me and him there is a distance equal to that of the east from the west." Thus it is said: "There is no nearness where there is enmity." This is the implication of this saying, "while the seeker who is in the east or the west is still beside Me." Thus it is that "love knows no distance." The secret is that once someone said to Majnun, "Laila has come." He hid his head in his cloak and said: "Laila is with me, and I am with Laila." This coming pertains to the invisible world, but a friend is not hidden from a friend.

If the Arabs were to conjure up a hundred thousand terrors
No fear would arise, for Laila's heart is one with Majnun's.

If someone should object at this stage saying: "Where does yearning come from?" then a suitable reply would be: "No matter how often a lover has an opportunity to see his friend, his eagerness and longing grow ever greater. You would feel like saying that he hasn't seen his friend. What applies to the wine of affectionate love and the pleasure of passionate love are quite similar. Have you not heard what the poet said?

Beauty is before me, yet its enjoyment is wanting:
A beggar, even if given the whole world, still begs.

This is so true that it is said that, in the next life, when the time of seeing arrives, each person will imagine that he alone is seeing.²¹⁵ If he knows that someone else is also seeing, then the pleasure of finding will not satisfy him. Although he is happy to be eating together with his brothers, yet he does not like to see his Friend with anyone else. A lover is even jealous of his own heart and eyes.

Out of jealousy for You I withdrew my eyes and heart,
Lest the former see, or the latter befriend, You.

How can one "see with another?" It means this. A dervish, in an intoxicated state, said: "O Lord, raise everyone up blind in the next life so that, apart from me, nobody else might see You." On another occasion he said: "O Lord, raise me up blind in the next life so that these eyes of mine may not see You."

How can an intelligent person possibly say
The unrestrained things a love-sick one can?

Another answer is that just as there is a portion for the interior, so also is there one for the exterior. Since seeing is an interpersonal affair, there is an external aspect to it. The pleasure of seeing comprises an external and internal element. In that way it becomes more perfect.

With every word the breath of Jesus
Bestows new life upon a dead youth.

If a person is in love with someone who is unlawful for him he realizes this through a spiritual sense. For him, no long discourse is needed. For anything connected with spiritual matters the essential point is this: "Unless you taste, you cannot know."

Upon arriving there you yourself will see all:
Worldly and religious problems will all be solved.
If this pain catches hold of you
It will forever be your guide.

If a child has no notion of the pleasure of kingship, what cause for astonishment is that? If a man, impotent from birth, rejects the pleasure of intercourse, would that seem strange? And if you try to explain this to them by means of a hundred examples, what profit would it be?

If an ant does not gather sugar, say: "Don't gather!"
If a blind man does not see a jewel, say: "Don't look!"

This letter has become lengthy and many points have been touched upon, but in a clear manner. O brother, be stout-hearted, for the root of all wealth is steadfastness. "A man is valued by his steadfastness." Know that anyone who is wholly intent on the world is a carrion-seeking dog.

Since you have not driven the world far from your heart
You have nowhere to go except the flames of hell.
A hundred worlds of knowledge, together with their meaning,
Is the burden brought by hell, together with the world.

Know that anyone whose goal is the life to come is covetous, a seeker after pleasure, but realize that anyone who steadfastly seeks the Lord is a precious jewel

for "he has no price." The one you have heard of is a man of God. He is called a dervish. This is the one who exercises his soul continuously night and day.

This world is the abode of calamity, and the next, of desires:
 I would not give a grain of barley to obtain both.
 Confusion pertains to this world, and honour to the next:
 I am free of both, belonging to neither this nor that.

God Most Exalted made you and me the dust beneath their shoes and sandals.
 May His blessing and grace be on the Prophet and all his family! Amen, O Lord of the worlds, Amen!²¹⁶

Letter 43 ABANDONING EXTERNAL VISITS

O brother in the faith, Maulana Sadruddin,²¹⁷ may blessings and salutations, reward and favours, be eternally multiplied for you! From your dear old friend, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as 'Sharaf,' with an abundance of affection. My brother, you should read this carefully and come to know that Qazi Zainuddin has recently arrived from your side.²¹⁸ He gave me detailed news of your health and well-being up till the last day he was with you. In this fashion the situation there was explained to me in greater detail than ever before - for which God be praised! He also said that you want to come to visit me. Indeed, it would not be surprising if you have already set out. Just look at the distance and consider the difficulties involved in coming and going. I have also heard that your children are all small and there is nobody except you to look after them. It would not be proper to abandon them. It is against right order to abandon something necessary for what is good but optional. You should realize this and stay where you are, because people who abandon what is obligatory and necessary for the sake of the pilgrimage to Mecca do so of their own accord. Be careful! The Law looks at your intention and purpose. Let that be enough.

Whatever you hold precious today will,
 After death, become your recompense tomorrow.

O brother, of what use is a meeting which takes place after separation and is followed by separation? "Separation after meeting is worse than death."

There is no difference between death and separation,:
 Every living being dies on account of separation.
 The pangs of death last but an hour, then comes repose:
 But the torment of separation remains for one who lives.

With the passing of time peace and tranquillity have come on both sides. It is not seemly to inflict that torment on heart and soul, changing the pleasure of meeting into the pain of separation. It might prove harmful for you or me. At this stage one should take note of this couplet:

Whoever You inflame and rest content with
 Has within him a secret for God.

As the Master of the Law²¹⁹ has said: "The prayer of a brother Muslim at the divine threshold will not be ineffectual." It is pleasing on both sides. The injunction of the Law is: "A man associates with the one he loves." According to the impulse of love, every lover wants to be with his beloved. There can be an abundance of consolation and peace, however, even in the absence of a person's image and apart from any external meeting.

We are not beggars, for the king of love,²²⁰
 With the help of Your beauty, is our king.
 We have heard an enchanting Voice from the hidden world:
 In both worlds Your pain is our medicine.

Letter 44

THE ABANDONMENT OF RANK AND INDEPENDENCE OF GOD

Dear brother, Maulana Sadruddin, salutations and prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneril You should read this letter carefully and realize that before this a letter, together with a memento, had been sent to you. I don't know whether it reached you or not. A friend - a man from Bihar - has just arrived and said: "Maulana Sadruddin is well, and has the post of Deputy Qazi of Sonargaon. While I rejoiced at hearing you were well, I felt completely disgusted when I heard you had accepted the post of Deputy Qazi."²²¹

O brother, you must be in your fifties. What place is there for the post of Qazi or of teaching, or of repeating what you already know? Strike up a fire²²² and burn the lot! Place your books and paper in a corner. Break your pen and pour out your ink. Grieve over what you are doing! Perhaps you will be carried beyond your benighted faith to safety.²²³

Burn and plunder everything except God:
 Cleanse everything except faith through Him.

Men of insight say that the sign of mystical knowledge for men is the abandonment of the world. It should be known that mystical knowledge is present wherever abandonment of the world is encountered. On the other hand, wherever abandonment of the world has not occurred, neither has mystical knowledge been found. Abandoning and knowing mystically together constitute the profession of faith, for this is composed of denying and affirming. The denial is the abandonment of the world, while the affirmation is knowing the Lord in a mystical way. Whoever has denied the world has denied everything, while whoever has acquired mystical knowledge of God has made a total affirmation. Reciting "There is no god but God" in reality means this. What profit is there for the person who simply rattles off "There is no god but God?"

If your heart is aware of what faith really means,
 The task of abandoning the world has been achieved.

O brother, the estimation of the people is a Brahminical thread made of iron. Such a thread indicates that a person has not come to grips with the faith. With such

an infidel soul in human nature which bows daily before a thousand idols, a person's vision of the beauty of Islam is blurred.

Because of this infidel in our human nature,
The world's Muslims have grown fewer.
O that my mother had not given birth to me,
And my infidel soul had not slain me!

O brother, today everyone - unless God wills otherwise - gives the name of "divine worship" or 'religion' to what is actually worship of self. The Glorious Quran says: "Have you seen someone who has made his desire his god" (Q45:23)? But who has ears to hear with, and knows the value of the faith of men of religion and recognizes the wickedness of his own infidel, idol-worshipping soul? Inevitably anyone who does bewails his condition. For example, they heard what the king of prophets and of saints, upon whose head was placed the crown of "If it were not for you, why should I have created the heavens" said. What did he say? "O that the Lord of Muhammad had not created Muhammad!" He, whose wealth consists of, "If compared, the weight of the faith of Abu Bakr is greater than that of my community," said: "O that I were a leaf on a tree so that a sheep might consume me!" The one whose title is, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is the gate thereto," said: "O that I had been my mother's discharge!"

O that my very name had never existed,
And agitation and peace had not been my lot!

Alas, alas, O brother, for the mystics and masters of insight, eating and sleeping, stability and peace do not perdure! This is on account of fear of their end, for they think: "What has the Pen recorded for me?" Who thinks about the occupations of being a judge, teacher or going over what is already known? They have seen that the one placed by God under a green dome to instruct others about Himself, and before whom sat respectfully the angels of the heavenly court as his disciples, at last had "a curse upon you" appear on his forehead!²²⁴

A hundred thousand years of devotion
Resulted in a curse around his neck.

The most ascetical of the sons of Israel had become a person whose prayers were answered. He had the divine throne and footstool revealed to him, and four hundred doctors of the Law attended his lectures daily, yet he ultimately ended up in the company of dogs and his appearance became like that of a dog.²²⁵ Humbled he spoke thus in an ecstatic state:

I used to curse the Devil
And give thanks for my blessings.
How could I know I was to do this evil?
Night and day I curse myself.
From head to toe I sigh for grief:
In all earth's quarters silently I weep.

It is said that the Apostle once asked Gabriel about his spiritual state. He replied: "O Apostle of God, since 'that one' was driven out from among us, nobody feels completely secure."

O brother, here the work is without cause. He does whatever He wants. What scope is there for resting on one's laurels? If His greatness can produce the stain of wrath on the most eminent of those nearest to God in the heavenly court, whose robe of existence has been adorned with, "They are not disobedient," it would still be just on His part. And if He places the crown of acceptance on the head of the most contemptible of the abandoned ones, upon whose forehead is inscribed, "Surely they will be veiled from their Lord on that day" (Q83:15), it would be a grace from Him. It would have to be full of divine wisdom. We should busy ourselves grieving over our own actions. The time we still have is precious. Afterwards of what use will sighing and repenting be? Life's remaining days should be occupied in this fashion.

What you seek along this Way will be given you:

If you sow unbelief, how can you reap faith?

The Lord is blind: only one who examines sees:

Whatever you want to take, He will say, "Take it!"

Letter 45

ANXIETY ABOUT ONE'S FAITH AND WHAT HAS BEEN ORDAINED

My brother, so dear to me, Maulana Sadruddin, may God number you among the scholars of the life to come, and may God preserve you from the company of worldly-minded religious scholars! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri. I have written two or three letters to you but don't know if they have reached you or not.

O brother, knowledge is vast yet our lives are short. We are not bound to acquire all knowledge. That measure is obligatory which is needed to ensure that our behaviour is correct. On the Last Day we shall be interrogated about what we have done, not about what we know. The criticism of this group is that knowledge is like the burden of an ass.

Since you have knowledge, let it guide your actions:

Problems are solved through knowledge and action.

For you, a little work, guided by religious knowledge,
Is far better than an ass-load of knowledge.

Go on, get to work, for much remains to be done:

A smattering of religious knowledge is all you need.

This pertains to religious knowledge and scholars of the life to come. You should flee from worldly-minded theologians, however, as from serpents and tigers.

It has been related that a holy man once saw Satan sitting down doing nothing. He said: "It is astonishing to see you sitting idle!" He replied: "Yes, but since worldly-minded theologians have appeared there is no work left for me to do!" Someone dear to God has written about them:

They seem intelligent, but have clouded minds:

They sell religion in their lust for office.

They are owners of orchards and gardens,
Not followers of the Law in heart and mind.
All are taken up with Samiri's²²⁶ magical spells:
They look like Moses but are actually snakes.
They have wandered far from Law and duty
And have thirsted for one another's blood.

O brother, the road is not secure; the resting place is far off; the body is weak; the heart is without hope; and time is precious. How could one rest or hang back here? What scope is there for teaching and repeating, for long sleeves and turban-sashes? They should all be burnt, and you should bemoan your plight.

Someone said to Khwaja Ibrahim Adham:²²⁷ "I want to hear something from you about knowledge of the Path." He replied: "My son, for a long time I have been lamenting over my own condition." He was asked the reason for this. He answered: "Because when the angel who fashioned me in my mother's womb completed his task he inquired of God if he should write a happy or wretched end for me. I don't know what reply he received. When the Angel of Death inquired of God whether he should snatch away my soul to felicity or wretchedness, I don't know what the answer was. On the Day of Resurrection, when the angel will ask God whether he will lead me off to paradise or to hell, I don't know what the answer will be."

O brother, along the path of religion all the ascetics and devotees of the world will duck their heads out of fear of the relentless sword of "God is altogether independent of creatures" (Q29:6)! All the righteous ones of the world are shaking and trembling, terrified that "He will question them about their righteousness." The harvest of devotion, at the hour of death, will be lifted up on the breeze of utter Self-sufficiency: "Then We shall turn to the work they have done and turn it into scattered dust" (Q25:23). When they are in the grip of the pangs of death, "And God will show them something of which they had never reckoned" (Q39:47) will torment their breasts.

Consider what happened to the leader of the angels who was in seclusion for 700,000 years. His angelic vesture was removed from his head and the stain of "A curse upon you!" was imprinted on his forehead. Consider also Balaam, son of Beor, who was unique and had been clothed with a great name. He was expelled from the mosque and tied up in a dog-kennel and "his behaviour became like that of a dog which pants whether you chase it away or leave it alone" (Q7:176).

What is belief or unbelief before His boundless wealth?
What is doubt or certitude before One without a tongue?
At His door there is no difference between Muslim or Zoroastrian,
Nor does a synagogue differ from a hermitage at His door.

O brother, the path of God's religion is not as most people imagine it to be. It is one of wrath mixed with consolation, and of soothing mixed with anger. Along the path of religion it is like erecting both pulpit and gallows.²²⁸ "He accepted whom He wanted without reason" applies here, as does "He rejected whom He wished without reason." In this situation how can anyone take it easy and relax?

At the Door without need, what does being young or old matter?
What difference does it make whether you exist or not?

It is related that the Apostle said to Gabriel: "My brother, how is your work going?" He replied: "O Apostle of God, ever since one of us was thrown down, none of us feels reassured and at ease."

Justice and wisdom are His glorious deeds:
Deception and wrath are His concealed power.

No matter how much you speak of His vindictiveness and tyranny, it is a hundred thousand times greater; and whatever you may say about His grandeur and self-sufficiency, it is a hundred thousand times greater. "There are two reprehensible things impinging on His grandeur and self-sufficiency: when a servant exalts himself above the divine throne, or bemeans himself excessively." If all the creatures of the world were to excel the righteousness of the Righteous One, so what? Or if all existing beings in the world outdid Pharaoh and Nimrod in insolent pride, what about it? "God does whatever He wants" (Q14:27) and "orders what He intends" (Q5:1). What scope is there for speaking or listening, sleeping or eating, resting or relaxing?

Why go on sleeping through negligence and drowsiness?
Climb the gallows, O foolish one! What are you without them?
All one's friends in the world of learning are serpents:
Enter seclusion and forget yourself: why deal with serpents?

It is said that, when the king of prophets and saints²²⁹ became freed from apostolic preaching, he would take off his belt of sinlessness; doff the cap of prophethood; and, loosening the tongue of need and helplessness, would say: "My sin is great, and none other than the Great Lord forgives great sins. O God, count me among those You have freed, released and saved from the fire!" At that hour²³⁰ those close to God in heaven and the righteous ones of the earth will be worried about their own salvation and wash their hands of their own redemption, for the command is: "I know God better than you do, and also fear Him more."

Become dust at God's door, not proudly strong,
For, along this Way, weeping will make a man of you.
With the command comes grace from God:
Pay attention to this, for you know naught of it.

Since he²³¹ was the head of all the mystics undoubtedly his fear-tinged awe²³² was greater; for the more one knows, the greater this sense of awe.

So that your Friend might become your purchaser,
You should intentionally make yourself priceless.

The state and condition of all seekers after God and of all the stalwarts of the faith is what has been described here. How can the quest itself for God arise in you or me since we don't experience the pain of religion? This is the root of all easy-going ways and all the negligence and ignorance which is our lot. "O God, have mercy on us, O God have mercy on us through Your mercy, O Most Compassionate One of all!"

O Lord, buy me back from my hands and tongue:
Stretch out Your hand and buy me back from the world.

When my carpet has turned black,
 Make it as white as my hair, O Beneficent One!
 Don't turn me away from Your door bereft of hope:
 Graciously change what is black in me into white!
 If from You a gentle breeze wafts my way,
 Dancing, I would offer my life in Your lane.

Letter 46**PATIENCE IN ADVERSITY AND THE ENDURANCE OF MISFORTUNES**

To Malik Khizr.²³³ Peace be to you, and the mercy and blessings of God! O brother, it is related that the first thing recorded about God Most Exalted in the Preserved Tablet is this: "I am God. There is no god but Me. My command is that whoever is not content with My decrees; nor gives thanks for My blessings; nor bears patiently the calamities I send, must be worshipping some lord other than Me."

Men renowned for insight as well as advanced Sufis, out of fear of the consequences of this tradition, are continually desirous that they might cease to exist and be turned into nothing. Yet if they are turned into nothing, what could they do? This is what they all say:

Your pain has proved medicinal for me:
 Your dust has acquired value for me.
 I am about to offer my life for You:
 After seeing You, I have become content.
 They risk body and soul, saying:
 I have a life to bear the burden of Your love:
 I shall not pass away until I complete Your work.²³⁴

O brother, no matter whether a slave is content or not with what has been decreed, it will not be altered. It is sinful simply to moan and groan, for it contains the fear and danger of "seeking another master other than Me." Take care! Remain alert, and gulp down poison as though it were sugar!²³⁵ Imitate the heroes of the faith, not the hermaphrodites of the world, and pay heed to this couplet:

Lovers imitate Your grief by drinking red wine:
 Grief is bitter, yet Your memory makes it sweet.

A sick person who drinks poison in hope of a cure considers it to be sugar.²³⁶ Whoever fixes his gaze on the divine decrees and ordinations becomes preoccupied with God's ordering of affairs.²³⁷ If you inflict the calamities of both worlds upon such a person it is but a speck of dust on a mountain.

Whoever is honoured by His arrow
 Has eyes, but nothing to look at.

Whoever turns his gaze towards himself becomes preoccupied with ordering his own affairs. The slightest difficulty seems like a mountain to him.

A person was once arrested and given a thrashing on suspicion of being a lover. He laughed. People remarked: "This is astonishing. He is beaten with a staff and he laughs!" He replied: "When I was being beaten my beloved was present to me and I was preoccupied with looking at her and paying attention to her. I didn't notice the staff or the pain."

The story of the Egyptian women²³⁸ bears witness to this saying. Do you know what patience is? It occurs when a servant has to suffer some misfortune or unpleasantness, yet he does not bewail his lot. Do you know what contentment is? It means that a servant does not get upset when beset by misfortune or unpleasantness.

Every calamity which is life-threatening,
Whether one or a thousand, suits him.

"It is God Who bestows and God Who takes away. Who are you to stand in between?"

If you received no wound from His blows,
For eternity there would be no hope of rest for you.
When His blows do produce wounds,
Then from Him balm as well as comfort is obtained.

Be a believer and hold fast to your faith as to your life! Moreover, you should offer up a hundred worlds for the sake of your faith. What do you have to do with wife or children, house or goods?

The world is occupied with being born and dying:
Sometimes it is making appear, sometimes carrying off.
Of necessity this work knows no limits:
For all eternity this pain knows no remedy.

It is related that faith has two requisites: one is rendering thanks for blessings received, while the other is patience in adversity. There are also two ways of ascertaining the truth: by means of blessings or adversity. If a person is tested with blessings, God looks for gratitude; if tested by adversity, He looks for patience. If a servant has rendered thanks for blessings conferred and borne trials patiently, know that faith is present. If you see someone who lays claim to faith, but find these two signs lacking, realize that it is a question of merely claiming and boasting, not of actual faith, for a claim, without anything to show for it, is false. You must have heard the saying: "All who make claims are liars."

In His kindness He makes nobodies into important people:
All He requires of His servants is gratitude and patience.

It is related that the Leader of the Faithful, Ali, said: "Patience is related to faith as the head is to the body." You know what the body would be worth without the head, don't you? The same would be true of faith without patience.

O brother, there are secrets and fruits in trials, and the apostolic teaching is: "Whatever He bestows is placed behind the curtain of adversity." It has been put thus:

Every trial given by God to this people
Has a treasure of grace placed within it.

Holy men have spoken thus: "Until the prophet Job experienced uninterrupted misfortune there was flesh upon his frame and he did not weep. When no flesh at all remained on him, very great misfortune indeed befell him. He was afraid because, when calamity strikes, gifts abound, but when misfortune diminishes, one has to bemoan a diminution of blessings. He cried out: 'Adversity has afflicted me, but of all those who show mercy You are the most merciful' (Q21:83)."

If you desire the wine of His eternal favour,
Traverse completely the valley of His wrath.
Unless you experience this, you won't experience that:
Adversity and pain are the only remedies for you.

It is related that the king of mystics²³⁹ used to say: "I have reached such a stage of accepting misfortune that, if He were to keep me in hell for all eternity, I would be happier than a person whom He takes to paradise."

Imam Shibli said: "On the Day of Resurrection, if God Most Exalted left me free to choose between paradise and hell, I would choose hell, because paradise is what I desire, while it is my Friend Who desires hell for me."²⁴⁰ The precondition of love is that the lover gives preference to what the beloved wants, not to what he wants. Glory be to God Who has such servants!

The unending experience of what it means to love
Is infinitely better than explaining or describing it.
If both worlds were to become a tongue for years on end,
They would not be able to explain the gift of such states.

Once a man came to the Apostle and said: "O Apostle of God, I love God." He replied: "Get ready for adversity!" A second man came up and said: "O Apostle of God, I love you." He replied: "Get ready to become a dervish." On the first occasion he said, "Get ready for adversity" and on the second, "Get ready for poverty." It is natural for calamity to strike where there is good behaviour, and for poverty to be associated with the qualities of the Messenger. Each person has to work according to his talents.

Son, if you want to become a man,
There is no means other than pain.

"God Most Exalted tests a believer by means of adversity just as one of you tests gold in the fire." "Adversity first afflicts prophets then saints" is no trifling saying.

Learn My secret, or you will remain far from My threshold:
I slay My friends! You don't know My secret.

Every single thing finds its contentment in comfort, not in affliction - except love, for love is nourished by adversity!

Give sweets to the person who has not tasted love!

Whenever a servant proclaims, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God" he turns his face away from everything and claims to love God and His Apostle. There has to be clear proof and demonstration of this. Otherwise, merely claiming to love, without clearly proving it in any way, would mean that the

claimant is a liar, for there is no way to substantiate the claim except by showing gratitude for His gifts and by exercising patience during the adversity He permits.

In His kindness He makes nobodies into important people:
All He requires of His servants is gratitude and patience.

O brother, there is nobody in that presence and kingdom who is more dear to God, more loving, more gracious or more especially chosen than Muhammad, the Apostle of God. Nor are there any sons more dear, more exalted or more noble than the Commanders of the Faithful, Hasan and Husain. If Satan comes along and one's selfish soul makes a tempting suggestion, recall what was said: "Anyone who experiences adversity should simply say, 'May this serve as a reminder for me!'" This is a clue. In this matter a believer should be happy with this measure.

O brother, the purpose of all this is your consolation and peace of heart. It will be helpful if you bring to bear whatever strength you have to the study of this letter. It will provide assistance to enable you to overcome the temptations of Satan. It should be studied repeatedly and a copy of the letter should be sent to the mother of Nizamuddin - may God pardon him!²⁴¹ May you have a good end!

Letter 47

HOW TO RECOGNIZE BY SIGNS THE DIVINE PLEASURE OR DISPLEASURE: THE QUEST FOR RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE: AND BRINGING COMFORT TO GOD'S CREATURES

Sent to Malik Khizr. Special prayerful greetings, dear brother, from the writer of these lines! O brother, the mystics say that, if you wish to know whether the Glorious and Exalted Lord is pleased with you or not, look at what you are doing. Are all your actions full of devotion; sinful; or a mixture of the two? If they are all full of devotion, He is pleased with you, for devotion is a sign of His good pleasure. If all your actions are sinful, however, He is displeased with you, for sin is a sign of His displeasure.²⁴² If your actions are a mixture of good and bad, the command would pertain to what predominates. From where could you or I, or the likes of us, acquire the wealth of complete devotion? We can at least hope that it is not overcome. And if - God forbid - we are overcome, we shall experience the punishment of His pain and torment, and whoever undergoes this pain and torment is destroyed.

O you inveterate sinner, in this passing world
Hurry towards repentance, then you'll move ahead.
Until you become dust, strive to be devout:
Don't waste your time: do whatever you can.

Here it is as necessary - indeed it would be a strict duty - to distinguish between the knowledge of devotion and sin as it is to discern between unbelief and faith. It is no easy matter to discern what is devotion and what is sin. It was for this very purpose that 124,000 messengers came, that reformers struggled so hard and people wrote at such length. What an astonishing work it is! The spirit of many a mystic and master of insight has been broken in this endeavour. The world is ignorant of this activity and

is engaged in seeking its own desires and pleasures.

Worldliness has proved an obstacle for you:
 You have no care for God at all.
 O foolish one, you have abandoned Wealth
 And given a good name to what is base.

The reason for all of this is that today verbal faith mainly predominates and this type of faith is useless at the time of death. If a physician who is an unbeliever tells somebody not to eat a certain food as it will prove harmful for him, immediately he refrains from eating it. Yet 124,000 messengers have come and have all said, "All Muslims are obliged to seek knowledge," but nobody does so. The reason is that the word of the unbelieving physician is considered worthy of credence but not that of 124,000 messengers. This is due to lack of faith in God and in His Apostle. In effect, this kind of faith is verbal, while there is unbelief in the heart.

Every moment you experience another fraud:
 There is another Devil in each of your hairs.
 In such a condition - which is very rare -
 The world is where you grieve, not rejoice.
 "O You who succour the needy, help us, help us, help us!"

O brother, the saying that "it is incumbent upon all Muslim men and women to seek knowledge" refers to this knowledge of devotion and sin, for everybody has the duty of discriminating the one from the other. No other knowledge is obligatory.

At the end of time, however, a people will appear such that, if gold and silver are placed in their hands, they will immediately, without any hesitation, say what its weight and value is. When it is weighed and tested, the weight and value will both turn out to be correct. If someone inquires about one of the commands concerning faith and unbelief, or about devotion and sin, they are at a loss. They simply don't know what faith is and what is unbelief. All they know is the name which they have heard and have taken to repeating. This age of ours is that age, and this era of ours is that era. We should throw dust on our heads and bewail our plight.

Where will we find a remedy for the pain?
 Life is over: what scope is there for grief?

O brother, since it is difficult to emerge from worldly preoccupations once and for all, what should you do? You should try as hard as you can to grieve over your religious practice and, as far as possible, you should not neglect the life to come. You should grieve and lament, as well as be apologetic about the way your devotions and good works, whether concerning goods or your body, were made easy for you, now that you have reached your fifties.²⁴³

Work with a will as long as you live,
 For you won't be able to when you die.
 Know the present that it may be easy for you:
 Otherwise you will have a surfeit of troubles.

In the midst of this darkness, make use of pen and tongue, as well as your own

goods and rank. Comfort the needy as much as you can. In your present situation, O brother, it is good to adhere to the measure of fasting, ritual and supererogatory prayer you are accustomed to, but no work will be more profitable for you than that of bringing comfort to hearts.

It is related that Khwaja Bishr Hafi²⁴⁴ was informed that a certain nobleman kept vigil by night and fasted by day. He said: "The poor fellow has abandoned his own proper work and taken up that of another!" He was asked to explain himself. He answered: "His work is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and bring comfort to hearts. Night vigils and fasting are tasks proper to others."

The world is not bad if you make use of it:
It becomes bad if your design is worldly.
The seed of today will bear fruit tomorrow:
Otherwise, O foolish one, quit the work!

You should try to give things to people before they ask for them, for intrepid mystics say: "No matter how insignificant a request be, it has a great value." Also, "The more requests are made and the more that is bestowed, the more they know that nothing has been bestowed, for the entire world is utterly nothing." Imam Shibli said: "If the entire world belonged to me I would make a morsel of it and would pop it into the mouth of some hungry person, yet I would still be in need of His favour."

Whoever makes worldly possessions his foundation,
No matter how exalted, relies on what will crumble.
Worldly goods and possessions are ambiguous:
Whatever you acquire, compared to Me, is nothing.

May your final end, O brother, and that of all Muslims, be good, together with the Prophet and his most excellent family! Peace!

Letter 48

IMMERSING ONESELF IN ONE'S WORK AND PLACING ONE'S HOPE IN THE LORD, THE GREAT FORGIVER

To the aforesaid Malik Khizr. Dearly beloved brother, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Brother, you should read this and understand that, no matter how obviously you are engaged in worldly affairs, and how very difficult it is to disentangle yourself from them all at once, still, be bold! Keep your heart, which is under the divine protection, free from the love and quest of the world, retaining nothing in it except the love and concern for God, for those acquainted with reality have said: "Finding God does not depend on seeking but on giving." A person does not find because he seeks but finds because it is given him.²⁴⁵ "I found my Lord through my Lord" means this. Similarly, a person does not see Him because he is looking at Him, but because he is shown Him. "I knew my Lord by means of my Lord" has this meaning.

It is not through imagining, thinking or sensing:
Without God, no one gets to know God.

Everything you possess, O dervish,
Is God's gift, not the result of your begging.

Showing is the cause of seeing, not looking, while giving is the cause of finding, not seeking. Many sought but did not find, while many found who were not seeking, for the flow of grace is not interrupted. Some are blessed as was Khwaja Uwais Qarani. As far as the members of his tribe were concerned, there was no one more contemptible or useless than he.

O seeker, honour no doubt belongs to people like him:
We should expect only contempt in this world and the next.

When the grace of the Exalted and Glorified Lord has accomplished its task it so grips a person that it is said that tomorrow, on Judgement Day, when the Apostle enters Paradise together with all the faithful, he will say: "O Lord, all the members of my community saw me and I saw them, except for Uwais Qarani, who did not see me."²⁴⁶ The reply will come: "Those who see you do so for My sake. What loss does anyone incur who has found Me, but not seen you?"

Whoever has been caught up in the secret of love
Remains a fully-alive intimate for all eternity.
Whoever has been purified from the stain of the world
Shines forth brightly, even though he be dust.

Thus you should realize that seeking is not the cause of finding, but that giving is the cause of finding.

While others seek and so do I,
The favoured one obtains the Friend.

An idol-worshipper seeks Him through an idol; Christians²⁴⁷ seek Him through Jesus; Jews seek Him through the Leader;²⁴⁸ and also a hundred thousand others, but none found Him. Thus it became known that a person finds what is given to him.

One glance from the Friend is happiness a thousand fold:
I await the time when that glance may fall on me.

O brother, remain in this grief which flows from a broken heart! Although broken things ordinarily have no value, the heart is an exception: the more broken it is, the more valuable it is. "I am with their broken hearts, not their glory" was the sign given them.

It is said that the messenger Moses once inquired: "My God, where should I look for You?" The reply came: "Close to the broken-hearted." He replied: "My God, there is no heart more broken than mine." The reply came: "Then I am there." The following hints at the meaning of this:

Alas, I have played with my soul and body:
I did not realize the value of my soul.
Even in the midst of a storm I am thirsty:
Yet the water is from the very Source of life!

No matter how much such things now pertain to investigating and hoping, nevertheless, as far as possible, there should be no slackness in seeking.

Even though wealth is bestowed without any cause,
 Devotion to God is the task of a man of wealth.
 The Way is not revealed to you in a flash:
 You are in need of a whole world of devotion.

O brother, your quest for God consists in coming to the aid of the broken-hearted, and your morsel and Sufi garb consists in what is fitting, namely, being of service, and, by means of your hands, tongue, pen and paper, bringing relief to those who are helpless.

Finally, you must have heard how much merit Rabi'a of Basra earned by giving water to a thirsty dog. And why shouldn't this be so, because "for every need you fulfil for one of the faithful, seventy of your own will be fulfilled."

Anything you can take along with you is not really yours:
 Discerning good from evil will prove a boon to you.
 Acquire provisions here, O jewel of Adam:
 What you have acquired here will be yours there.

May God Most Exalted, from his bounty and favour, grant you the grace of His friendship! Peace!

Letter 49

THE ETERNAL COMMAND AND THE DETHRONING OF THE INTELLECT

To the aforementioned Malik Khizr. Greetings and special prayers, O brother! A long time has elapsed since anyone came from your locality. When Qamaruddin arrived I learnt how things were going. My mind was put at ease. The world is the place for testing. The command of the intellect is overturned here.

No heart has access to His essence:
 Heart and soul are ignorant of His perfection.
 By exerting intellect, soul and senses,
 What can one who knows God achieve?

In this life enemies are distinguished by blessings, while saints are noted for trials. The intellect is the tool of analogical reasoning but, correctly speaking, God is not attained by it, for finding God depends on His will, not on the analogical reasoning of His servants. Our intellects instruct us to cultivate our friends and mistreat our enemies, but the practice of the Glorious, Most Exalted God is to rain down calamities upon His friends, while He fulfils every desire of His enemies. Reason teaches us not to make enemies and, if one appears, to destroy him, unless this proves impossible. God Most Exalted, on the other hand, creates him, nourishes him and does not destroy him. He also helps him get what he wants. So, since the Way does not lie open to analogical reasoning, there is no work pertaining to God left for the intellect.

The intellect has been created so that a servant might know how to act. Without an intellect man would not know how to act correctly. It was not given for him to know

God, the Most Exalted Lord, by analogical reasoning, for the intellect, even though it be an accurate means of weighing things, nevertheless a mountain cannot be weighed on a banker's scale! Hence it is said:

A servant needs an intellect to know what to do:
You need a soul in order to acknowledge the Lord.

O brother, since neither Gabriel nor Michael knows the secret of what is ordained, what access could there be for a helpless intellect?

What do you know about God's creation?
How can you recognize what God says or perceives?
You are taken up with seeking bread and water:
How can you know His inner secrets?

One must bow one's head before whatever comes to pass. What else can be done? This is what being a servant means.

A good servant does what he is told:
He does whatever the Lord wants.

Thus it is that the first line that appeared on the Preserved Tablet is this: "I am God: there is no god except Me. My mercy has overtaken my anger. The person who is not content with My decree, and does not bear My calamities patiently, and does not thank Me for My blessings, seeks a lord other than Me."

If work were to depend on the desire of servants, it would be done by prophets and saints, for they are outstanding in their commitment.

You have not experienced the heat and cold of the age:
You have not arrived at the threshold of the hidden Inn.

Genuine discipleship involves setting aside all desires as one's allotted destiny unfolds. It also means doing things without any personal motive, for a servant should have no desires. Things happen according to what has been ordained and commanded. What He intends comes to be. "God does whatever He wants and commands what He intends to happen."

Sometimes I have a fistful of silver, sometimes nothing:
Sometimes I am the last of all, sometimes out in front.
Sometimes my heart is full of joy, sometimes it is empty:
I am the chameleon of this age of mine.

It is therefore clear that devoted service and personal desire are incompatible. All the confusion, grief and sorrow which afflicts us today comes from the pursuit of our own desires. Inevitably the quest of the impossible produces this result. Place devotion before you and, night and day, say: "Lord, I have wronged myself grievously. Forgive my sins, for none other than the Great Lord forgives great sins."

If you want to be somebody, become His servant:
If you become His dog, this would suffice.
If His Way becomes opened up for you,
Then this is the wealth you can boast of.

Nothing else is found in God. "It is either You or I."

The perfect ones have tasted blood on the path to God:
 They passed their time in devotion and service of God.
 Inevitably they became kings in the line of devotion:
 They became the most exalted people in the world.

Letter 50

BEING CONTENT WITH GOD'S COMMAND

To the aforementioned Malik Khizr. Special greetings and prayerful wishes, dear friend! Your letters arrived, brought by Mahmud on one occasion and by Badi' on another. They were read carefully. O brother, it is certain that there can be no alteration in whatever is known by the Lord about each of us. Whatever has been ordained from eternity for each person concerning what he will do, eat or drink, can neither be increased nor diminished. "It is all well balanced, whether it be something lawful or forbidden; or regarding submission or disobedience." It becomes clear that a command was issued from eternity and a person's destiny is fixed. There is no other course except docility to what is commanded and submitting to what has been determined.

O brother, what can be said? A hundred and twenty-four thousand messengers came. They invited the people.²⁴⁹ This resulted either in profit or disadvantage. The very thing happened which had been commanded and determined from eternity.

A child can read at school
 Whatever is found in a master's writings.

Because of them it became clear that it is this and no more. Since the world is the theatre of wisdom and the work runs by means of it, each person does precisely what was commanded and allotted from eternity: no more and no less.

God's command with regard to your life
 Was written by night, and you read it by day.

Moreover, all these things which have been ordained are firmly believed in by a believer. This firm belief has to be present for his faith to be sound. A servant has no proof to establish what the eternal command is, but he should be ashamed of his own condition. He should repudiate anything he does which is not pleasing to God, as well as remain continually penitent, seeking forgiveness and repenting.

If you can, grasp what religion is, O wayward one:
 This is the path of religion: travel along this road!
 Retire from this impermanent world:
 Prepare herein provisions for the world to come.

In your letter you mentioned that the Qazi of the place was saying something critical about the letter of Maulana Sadruddin.²⁵⁰ O brother, if there were any scent of felicity or any portion of the religion of men in that unfortunate one, he would not be facing this sacrificial knife today: "The man who has become a Qazi is like a sacrifice

without a knife." Since he has been sacrificed he has been slain by the knife of the threat of the Law. What has happened to him and his religion? He is still a child at the breast! Rather, he is still in his mother's womb, or a sperm in his father's loins, or even in the world of non-existence. He has no knowledge of the religion of hermaphrodites, so how could he know anything about that of men?

Avoid excess as you would Abu Jahl:
He did not enter the circle of Muhammad.

Another person has said:

O you who have been overburdened by God,
What business do you have with such works?

O brother, the disbelieving Meccans were like people who claimed to see for themselves, to speak and to hear. These words were revealed concerning them: "Deaf, dumb and blind" (Q2:18). They are all deaf; they are all dumb; and they are all blind. Worldly theologians are considered thus by the scholars of the life to come and are all excused, for wherever there is hearing, speech and sight, the deaf, the dumb and the blind are considered excused.

Every person who is within the eternal veil,
Is like an owl compared to the sun.
The eyes of the mind focus on God:
Those that perceive colour cannot see God.

It is said that Islam remained fresh as long as there were no worldly theologians on the scene. When they appeared, Islam was thrown into confusion. Thus it happened that a wise man saw Satan seated. He said: "It is astonishing for me to see you taking it easy." He replied: "Worldly theologians have appeared. Now I have plenty of free time." Do you know who the worldly theologians are? Those who eat the bread of sultans and turn their faces towards sultans and kings.²⁵¹ Together with them they have become enmeshed with the affairs of the world and knowledge, which is concerned with the life to come, is put to worldly uses. Concerning them it has been said:

Acquiring knowledge for the sake of palaces and gardens
Is like providing a lamp for a thief.

This is a cause of much sadness. I ask pardon of God! I ask pardon of God! I ask pardon of God!

Why did Sheikh Sulaiman load himself with troubles? Muhammad, the Apostle of God, kept on inviting Abu Talib²⁵² and Abu Jahl for twenty to thirty years, all to no avail. That unfortunate one²⁵³ has been slain by the Law, and a slain person is dead. Since is dead, how can he hear what Sheikh Sulaiman is saying?

[Letter S]

PATIENCE WITH ONE'S LOT WHERE THE COMMAND OF THE PEERLESS LORD IS CONCERNED

To the aforementioned Malik Khizr. It is my special prayer that God's peace be with you, my dear friend! From the letter of your son, Safi, I learned the full details of your misfortune. Moreover, at the end of the letter I noticed that you would be freed within a day or two. The thought occurred to me that you must have been freed and not remained until the end of the day. Lately, however, one day²⁵⁴ in the month of Zil-Hijj, another letter from your son Safi arrived informing me that the condition perdures. Although your mind has become disturbed, as is natural for a human being, nevertheless contentment has been bestowed as your portion by the command of the Lord Most Exalted, and you have entrusted yourself to His grace. Please God you will soon be released and freed from your sorrow, and your victory and release will become manifest.

If wrath is our final punishment,
There is also grace for us at the end.

A slave, by the very fact of being a slave, should acquiesce in what is commanded by God Most Exalted and bow his head to what He has ordained, as that unfortunate one said:

What will a slave do who bows not to the command?
Or a ball which doesn't give itself to the polo stick?

O brother, since the world is a place of misfortune and trial there is no escape for a servant but to oscillate, from time to time, between two different states: sometimes blessings are bestowed; at other times, misfortunes. A servant cannot bypass this latter condition as he continually changes from one state to the other.

Sometimes I have a fistful of silver: sometimes I have nothing:
Sometimes my heart overflows with joy: sometimes it is smitten.
Sometimes I am behind everyone: sometimes out in front:
I am the chameleon of this age of mine.

Our father,²⁵⁵ even though he possessed the crown of prophethood and the throne of the kingdom, was not driven out of a place like paradise without misfortunes and trials. It is said that he arrived in paradise on the first day with his crown and royal dignity, but the day had not ended before he was driven out naked! How could his offspring, in a place like this world, which is the abode of misfortune, pass through it without trials?

He does not oppress, but tests and makes sure:
Yet I, unfortunate one, am so tormented!

O brother, neither Gabriel nor Michael knows anything about the secret of His determining and ordaining, so what chance is there for a helpless intellect to penetrate the inner secrets of what He has determined and ordained? It is proper, however, that it should be ultimately beneficial, even if someone does not like it. "It may be that you are shunning something which is good for you." Consider the story of the

messenger Joseph. When he was a young boy his brothers threw him into a well, even though he had done nothing wrong. Afterwards they drew him out of the well and sold him into slavery. He was raised from slavery to royalty.

O world of the soul, all are astonished by You:
A hundred thousand intellects have been confused by You.

There is peace in nothingness or in eternity, but for an existent being, which is between the one and the other, for the sake of testing, all is misfortune and calamity. What can be done? He spoke correctly who said:

O that you did not exist, Iraqi!
Rebellion is all that can be expected from you.

Another unfortunate one lamented thus:

I wasted away with grief over each injustice:
No one else could match my sorrow.
If He contends with me a tempest will suddenly arise,
A cry from every vein, as from the strings of a lyre.

It is said, however, that "faith has two components: one consists of gratitude, the other of patience." A person should express gratitude for His blessings and exercise patience while bearing His afflictions, so that one's worship might be rendered perfect and one's faith might remain correct, not one-sided. The example of religious men should be followed in order to experience what has been promised to those who are both grateful and patient. You will experience so many blessings and kindnesses that the whole world won't be able to count them. The Venerable Quran says: "And if you counted up God's blessings you would never be able to number them" (Q14:34). It is your task, however, to render yourself agreeable by giving thanks and exercising patience.

At His good pleasure He gave importance to the worthless:
Gratitude and patience was all He asked from His servants.

He has made many promises concerning gratitude and patience.

O dervish, reckon every gift you possess
A gift from God, not the fruit of begging.

May you come to a good end! Peace!

Letter 52

LOVE AND YEARNING

Addressed to Malik Shamsuddin. After forwarding the customary prayers I want you to realize, my brother, that Khwaja Sulaiman brought me your letter together with mementoes in the form of silk cloth and cash. May God reward you for what you have written and sent!

I have written much and expatiated on the topic of love and yearning. O brother, it is quite normal for a person to see and be filled with affection and love for someone,

but falling in love with someone you have only heard about is indeed something astonishing.

The secret of His love was not grasped by the people,
For it is beyond their ken or experience.
It would be more astonishing if His exalted name
Were taken on no tongue in this world or the next.

All the brothers of the messenger Joseph were in Egypt, but the fragrance of Joseph's cloak didn't reach any of them. It is said that Canaan is eighty leagues away, yet the fragrance of Joseph's cloak reached the messenger Jacob in Canaan. It is evident that the messenger Jacob was a friend and lover, and the fragrance of the beloved and desired one more often reaches the one who loves and desires him, not to any other person. Even if a whole assembly were devoted to the hidden wonders of the problem of love and its commands - for this is the heritage of those dedicated to love and affection - nevertheless externalist scholars would be far from comprehending it. If they were of this faith, however, it would mean much to them, for it is something to be experienced.

Intellect and commands are meant for drawing boundaries,
While love and faith are realities to be experienced.

Thus it is that saintly men say: "Oh, how many men prostrate themselves alongside us yet, between us and them there is a distance like that which separates east from west. And how many there are, to the east or west of us, who prostrate themselves beside us." It has been put thus: "There is no distance where love is involved, while there can be no nearness where enmity is found." Wherever there is love, what can detraction do? And where there is no love, what can physical proximity achieve?

It is related that an Arab said: "O Apostle of God, I consider you my very close friend but, on account of the distance between us, I was not able to come to you. What do you have to say about my condition?" He replied: "A person is with the one he loves." This is in accordance with the demands of love. That Arab rejoiced.

We are not beggars, since the king of love,
Assisted by Your beauty, is our king.
In the morning we have a dream from the hidden world:
Our hearts continue to ache for You in this world and the next.

It is said that, after the advent of Islam no joy could match what the Companions felt when this tradition was proclaimed: "A person is with the one he loves." In all places this acted like a tonic for those who love and seek after God. All whose heads had been turned by the wilderness of love were helped.

The whole world turns towards my beauty:
The King of the whole world resides in my lowly heart.

This exposition was undertaken so that you might grasp that, wherever you may be, in the east or the west, you should be engaged in the task of loving, of acting like a lover with his beloved. What do you have to fear from the distance separating you?

Steadfastness abides in the world of holiness:
 How could Gabriel place his feet therein?
 By yourself you will reach the seat of righteousness,
 When His love alone becomes your guide.

Since you believe in me and have a good opinion of me, I have accepted you as well and have sent you my spiritual guide's cap.²⁵⁶ Send out an invitation to several of the dervishes round about and don the cap in their presence and perform two cycles of prayer. Remain occupied, night and day, with ablutions. Give twofold thanks at each ablution. Whenever you have some free time, even though it be after the mid-afternoon prayer, study my letters and the accounts of our assemblies which have reached you. Put into practice what is enjoined therein to the best of your ability.

Commit no fault in performing your devotions,
 For you have been given everything you need.

According to the saying, "The pen is one of two tongues," you should imagine you are listening to my voice.

Letter 53

THE FAITHLESSNESS AND BLAMEWORTHINESS OF THE WORLD

To Malik Shamsuddin.

The work of the world is simply delusion:
 It is utterly wicked, nothing more!
 Its deceptive charm enlightens none:
 In the midst of dust is nothing but blood.

O brother, the world is a swindler and a traitor. It is the chameleon of the age. It is honey-coated poison. The person it embraces in the morning it abandons in the evening. The person who draws breath in the morning is carried in feet first at the time of evening prayer. Its cup is not unaffected by what is vile, nor is it without its dreadful price.

Don't taste its cup, for it is filled with poison:
 Don't smell its roses or leaves, for thorns lie hidden there.
 A contentious age keeps faith with none:
 We have seen and heard of proofs time and again.

This old spouse recalls the slaying of many young kings. Many lovers remember how they were swept off their feet. Whoever is given something has it snatched away from him. Whoever has something bestowed upon him has to seek it again, as it has been said:

It gives but then shamelessly takes back:
 It knows nothing except giving and taking back.
 What is bestowed upon man, so lowly of days,
 Which is not, little by little, finally taken away?

The world is a desert. Its enchantment is such that all its adornment and display is like a dream. All its food and clothing is a figment of the imagination, and all its joys and pleasures are but a wet dream. An ordinary mortal's head is turned by all this. The composer of the following spoke correctly:

I asked a wise man about the state of the world:

He replied: "It is a dream, empty air or a fable."

Again I asked: "What about the man whose heart is bound to it?"

He said: "He is either a ghoul, a demon or a madman."

It would be astonishing to have rejoicing without grief; joy without sorrow; life without death; health but no sickness; eternity but no passing away; desire and no pain or weariness; or food without sweat. A scholar in search thereof will experience a hundred trials and obstacles. Khwaja Attar puts it thus:

The base world opens its jaw like a crocodile

In order to catch hold of good and bad by the neck.

Until the Day of Resurrection, all get entangled:

No one can escape from its deceit or snare.

Collect the dirt of the world like powdered dust

And pour it on the head of the man-devouring world.

If you acquire even a morsel of bread,

You will have to suffer a hundred disasters.

A scholar was reputed to have memorized the contents of four hundred boxes.²⁵⁷ He had no other occupation except imparting knowledge and performing his prayers. Nevertheless his heart was stained with love of the world. A revelation came upon the messenger of that age. "Say to him: 'Although night and day you study and pray, and have memorized the contents of four hundred boxes, nevertheless, since your heart is polluted with love of the world, it has not been accepted.'"

Since you love the world, God will not accept

The slightest thing from you, so how can you boast?

Since you have not flung the world far from your heart

There is no place for you but to burn in hell.

A hundred worlds of knowledge, together with its meaning,

Bears hell as its fruit, together with the world.

O brother, in spite of all these defects and a hundred other similar ones, nevertheless its virtue is that it is a field prepared for sowing seed for the next life for those favoured by God - to Whom be praise!

It is necessary for you to give thanks, my brother, that people coming from your side continually speak of you in this fashion and all have a good opinion of you. May your respect for the Prophet and his family go on increasing! This was why the Apostle said: "Most excellent is the property of a just man for a just man!" This applies to you, my brother. In this situation the world would not be bad. All-embracing is the saying of the person who said:

Since you have acted thus, the world is good for you:

For the sake of your religion, consider the world your friend.

O brother, as far as you can use hands and tongue, pen and paper, money and substance to cultivate this field. If there is nothing left for your shroud, so much the better!

It is right to give everything away:
It is good if nothing remains for your shroud.

Letter 54

CONTENTMENT WITH BARE NECESSITIES AND A SUFFICIENCY OF WHAT IS NEEDED

Khwajagi,²⁵⁸ prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! You should study carefully the aim of what has been written. O brother, if somebody were to spend a lifetime writing books about the defects and calamities of the world, he would not exhaust the topic. If you cannot be content with the bare necessities of life, you should be content with what you actually need in order to find deliverance from the troubles and calamities of the world, and occupy yourself in getting ready for death and the grave.

Nobody in this world of land and sea
Has greater wealth than contentment.
Whoever has manfully trodden the path of contentment
Has a heart unmoved by the world's wealth.
If a contented person begs
He truly acts like a king.
If you had bread and threadbare garments
The tip of every hair of yours would be a king.
Whoever has been purified from the grip of the world
Becomes a dazzling light, even though he had been dust.

A dervish was experiencing the pangs of death. He had a blanket draped around him. He flung it off. People said: "What are you doing?" He replied: "I want to go exactly as I came." A dervish is completely at ease. He is far from the calamities and strife which afflict worldly people. A great challenge for a dervish, however, is when want befalls him. The very night he experiences it he will also experience an ascent to God.²⁵⁹ The Sufis and faqirs say: "The ascent of the faqir occurs the night he experiences want." Thus it became known that there is no blessing more exalted than that of being a dervish.

Even though Solomon undertook so much work
For his rule extended from earth to heaven:
Yet, when he recognized the value of poverty,
He earned his living by weaving baskets.

O brother, poverty is one of the divine secrets. Whatever exists in the heavenly court came into the Apostle's view on the Night of Ascent, yet he didn't even look at anything out of the corner of his eye! He said: "Poverty is my boast." The messenger Adam had angels prostrate before him. The eight heavens were assigned to him.

When his gaze penetrated the secret of poverty, however, he sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.

When Adam's soul glowed with the secret of poverty,
He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.

Whenever Satan whispers his suggestions and you feel constrained, and worldly people upbraid you, and you see them enjoying themselves like Pharaoh or Korah, and you feel an inclination towards such things within yourself, then you should read this letter carefully. You will find that it will give you consolation.

Life passes by in five or six days:
Whether happily or not, still it passes by.
Since this is how the rest of life will go,
What will remain, except a fleeting memory?

Letter 55

ENDURANCE IN OBSERVING GOD'S COMMANDS, AND ACQUIESCENCE IN TIME OF ADVERSITY

To my brother, the afore-mentioned Malik.²⁶⁰ The Word of God Most Exalted is: "You will die and they will die" (Q39:30). Peace be to you, and the mercy and blessings of God! O brother, it is related about God Most Exalted that the first thing that was written on the Preserved Tablet²⁶¹ was: "In very truth I am God. There is no god except Me. My command is that anyone who is not content with My decree, or does not give thanks for My blessings, or endure My calamities patiently, seeks a god other than Me."²⁶²

Those endowed with insight and the great mystics, out of fear of this news, every hour wish to cease existing and be reduced to nothing. In nothingness, however, what will they do, since nothing remains.

I have a soul to bear the burden of Your love:
Until Your work in it is complete, I shall not flee.

When the Messenger asked a group of his friends, "What sort of people are you?" they replied: "We are believers." He said: "What sign of your faith can you show?" They replied: "We endure misfortunes patiently and are thankful for blessings received, and are content with what has been decreed on our behalf." He exclaimed, "By the Lord of the Ka`ba, you really are believers!"

A mystic was asked if he had been granted complete contentment. He replied: "I have not reached the final stage of contentment, yet I am on my way there. If I were to be made the narrow bridge spanning hell across which people passed in order to reach paradise, and finally hell were to be filled with me alone to test whether my word was genuine or not, I would be content."

Whoever has been granted a trace of friendship
Receives wealth a hundredfold with every breath.

If but the slightest trace of love appears
Its power turns a mountain into an ocean.

A saintly man was asked with whom God was pleased. He replied: "Whoever is happy in affliction as well as in good times."

If this pain takes hold of you,
It will be your guide forever.

The Israelites said to Moses: "Inquire from your Lord on our behalf as to whether He is pleased with what we do or not." Moses prayed: "My God, You heard what they said." The Lord Most Glorious replied: "O Moses, tell them I am as pleased with them as they are with Me."

It is better for a person to follow commands
Than get the Lord to give him what he wants.

O brother, whether a person acquiesces to the divine decree or not, it will not be altered. Lamenting and grieving, weeping and wailing, is simply sinful. This contains the fear and danger of: "If My decree is not accepted, look for another lord!" Be extremely careful and prudent, and happily reject this sugar-coated poison. Follow the example of men of faith, not of worldly hermaphrodites!

Lovers imbibe grief for You along with red wine:
Grief is bitter, but it is sweetened by Your memory.

Also:

With the sorrow of the Friend, they tell me,
Be patient, as if digesting aloes.
A sick person craves a return to health:
If it means taking poison, he will deem it sugar.

O brother, whoever looks carefully at what is fixed and determined becomes engrossed with gazing upon God. If the calamities of both worlds were placed upon his shoulders, he would consider them a speck of dust upon a mountain. Whoever is engrossed in himself, however, becomes taken up with weeping and wailing, and a speck of misfortune seems like a mountain on a piece of straw.

Consider potable any poison coming from Him:
Whether good or bad, everything is good.
With you a name can be despicable or good:
Yet everything from Him is pure gift.

A person was arrested on suspicion of being a lover and received five hundred strokes. He laughed all the time. People said: "This is astonishing! He is being beaten, yet he laughs." He replied: "When I was being beaten my beloved appeared to me and I was preoccupied with gazing rapturously upon her. I wasn't aware of the beating or the pain." The story of the Egyptian women is well known. While gazing upon the prophet Joseph they cut their hands but were unaware of it.

Whoever is honoured by His shaft,
Has eyes fixed upon His feet.

Every misfortune the heart depicts from Him,
Be it one or a thousand, is acceptable if from Him.

Do you know what patience is? If some misfortune or trial befalls a servant, he does not lament. And do you know what contentment is? When a calamity or trial befalls a servant, he does not become unhappy. "What he gives is for God, and what he takes is for God. What are you in between?" Something redundant! Remove yourself from being in between and become a believer, and guard your faith as though it were your life. Indeed, be ready to sacrifice a hundred lives, if you had them, in order to preserve your faith. What are wife and children, mother and father, brothers and sisters?

If you are alive, die of thirst for Him:
Become dust at this threshold, if you are a servant.
The slightest trace of God's pain in your heart
Is better than gaining both worlds for yourself.

It is related: "Faith has a twofold aspect: gratitude for blessings received, and patience in adversity." The truth of this can be ascertained in two ways: either in a time of blessing, or in one of adversity. If He tests with blessings, He is seeking gratitude; if through adversity, He is seeking patience.

He has graciously deigned to make nobodies important people:
He expects gratitude and patience from His servants: that's all!

If a servant is grateful for blessings and patient during trials it means that he has faith and believes in One God. On the other hand, if you hear someone claiming to have faith and to believe in One God, yet you do not see these two qualities, you will know that it is an empty claim. Do you know what an empty claim, without anything to substantiate it, is? In a Qazi's court if someone makes an empty claim but has no witness to produce, where is he carried off to?

No one at all is aware of Reality:
All will leave here empty-handed.

It is related that Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, said: "Patience is related to faith as the head is related to the body." From this you will understand what a body without a head is like. The same applies to faith where there is no patience.

Rare indeed it is, when afflicted,
To be found a slave, and act like one.

O brother, afflictions contain secrets and benefits not to be found in blessings. The prophetic tradition concerning this is that, whatever is bestowed, is placed behind the veil of affliction.

Every trial that is visited upon this people
Has a bountiful treasure hidden beneath it.

Saintly men have said that, as long as the prophet Job was continually afflicted and some flesh remained upon his frame, he did not lament. When no trace of flesh remained on him he realized he was in extreme straits and grew afraid for, when afflictions increase, gifts do too. He groaned because fewer afflictions made him

afraid that his gifts would be fewer. He said: "Lo, adversity afflicted me, and You are the Most Merciful of all who show mercy" (Q21:83).

O brother, Pharaoh was given an unsolicited kingdom and prosperity for four hundred years. Even if he had sought the pain, burning heat, hunger and affliction of Moses, not an iota of it would have been given to him.

O friend, We have not given Pharaoh even a headache,
For he has not grasped the secret of Our pain.

When a servant attracts affliction upon himself it is a proof of his friendship with God. It is said that any day Rabi'a of Basra did not experience affliction, she would turn to God and say: "My God, You have given me bread: where is my unpalatable food?" O you bedecked in a fine turban and cloak, with your claim to manliness, don the strength of this robe! Look sharply, and be ashamed of your turban and cloak! The Apostle was offered the choice between possessions and poverty. Since he was the fountainhead of all the mystics, he chose poverty, for he knew that poverty is the abode of affliction. He has placed something special therein for His friends.

Trample under foot the goods of both worlds
If you want to bring desire under your control.

Since not even a particle from the world of love and intimate friendship was bequeathed to Pharaoh or Nimrod they were made important, wealthy rulers so that people might know that God deals in one way with His friends and those who love Him, and in another with his enemies and those estranged from Him.

A man approached the Apostle and said: "O Apostle of God, I love God." He replied: "Get ready for adversity!" It became known that whatever He bestows upon His friends is placed beneath the veil of adversity.

Every trial bestowed by God upon this people
Has a bountiful treasure placed beneath it.

O brother, it is related that "God tests a believer with affliction as one of you might test gold in the fire."

If you are preoccupied with increase and loss,
Testing will reveal your real worth.

It is also related that the Apostle said: "What was said to Abraham, the Friend of God, 'Sacrifice your son!' was not a trial: nor was it a trial when the saw was dragged across Zachary's head. The real trial and misfortune that was poured upon my head was when He said: 'Everything is for your sake.' He also said: 'You have accomplished nothing.' Once He swore an oath to me: 'By your life' (Q15:72)! On another occasion He struck me over the head with 'Did He not find you an orphan and protect you' (Q93:6)? Sometimes the divine throne was made into a carpet for me, while at other times for a cup of barley I am led to the door of a Jew."

Sometimes my hands are filled with silver, sometimes with penury:
Sometimes my heart is bursting with joy, sometimes sorely wounded.
Sometimes I'm behind everyone, sometimes in front of all:
I am the chameleon of this age of mine.

O brother, when a servant says, "There is no god but God," he turns his gaze from everything and claims to love the Lord, then "inevitably, evidence is needed," otherwise it would be merely a claim without evidence. He would be a claimant lacking credentials or proof - unless he thanks God for His gifts and exercises patience during trials coming from Him.

At His good pleasure He made nobodies important people:
He sought only gratitude and patience from His servants.

Now realize that there is no one who is dearer, more loved, honoured or precious to the Great and Glorious Lord than Muhammad, His Apostle. Nor is there any son dearer, more noble or exalted than the Leaders of the Faithful, Hasan and Husain. If Satan comes and whispers something, create a row! As was said: "Tell everyone who experiences affliction: 'Remember Me, as long as your affliction lasts!'" This is the measure which is pleasing to a believer. When affliction occurs, one should be all tranquillity and peace.

Every trial which reminds a person of Him,
Whether one or a thousand, must come from Him.

The aim of writing all this is to bring peace and consolation to your heart, my brother. No matter how much confidence I have in your strength, your ability to drink this poison, submit to the Divine Decree and remain content with what God bestows, nevertheless the study of this letter should provide some help and assistance in combating the insinuations of Satan. As a wise man has said: "The work does not consist of eating barley, drinking vinegar and wearing a woollen or fur garment, but in being content with the Exalted and Glorious Lord."

God's command, when He turns His attention to you, is
To be ready to sacrifice your life, not go on sighing!

We shall conclude this discussion about afflictions with the words of the Exalted Lord in His Glorious Book: "When misfortune strikes them, they say: 'We belong to God, and are returning unto Him'"(Q2:156).

For every heart there is no path except astonishment:
Yet no soul knows when it will come or go.
The work of the world is nothing but enchantment:
It is nothing else but badness heaped on badness.

Letter 56

BRINGING ONE'S SELFISH SOUL TO HEEL

To Maulana Mahmud of Satgaon,²⁶³ one of the friends.

The mere trace of God's pain in your heart
Is better for you than acquiring both worlds.

O brother, there should either be the joy of finding God in one's heart, or the pain and trouble of not finding Him. Each heart which is devoid of these, even though it is honoured with "the heart is the house of God," has become the abode of demons.

O foolish one, we have played with body and soul:
 We have not recognized the value of our soul.
 All of us pass on thirsty in this storm
 While all that water flows from the Source of life.

When death approaches, then "as you have lived, so shall you die." Tomorrow, on rising from the grave, it will be "as you have died, so shall you rise." Let us seek refuge in God!

Whatever you remember while in this world,
 Is what you will be eternally united with.
 Whatever it is you hanker after now,
 Is what, after death, you will receive tomorrow.

Be careful to ensure that negligence finds no entry. One should never be free of this pain but, day by day, should try to see that it grows, for a person's measure and worth depend on this pain. Otherwise, he would simply be an animal, not a man.

Whoever does not experience this world-igniting pain
 Is in darkness: no daylight shines on him.
 Whoever lacks this pain is not a man:
 There is no remedy, if you lack this pain.

Don't imagine that, when you have prayed and fasted a great deal, these two activities will make you prosper.

O venerable one, don't behave in such a way
 As to pray or fast too much!
 In that way you remember more what you have done
 Rather than turn towards the Lord at every moment.

Again:

If all this fasting makes you fat
 It's better to eat your fill than fast!

Occupy yourself with considering how to remove this dog-like selfish soul which is blocking your path. If you say, "I am helpless: how can I remove it?" you are correct. Seek God's protection and raise your hands in prayer and supplication, saying:

O Creator, as long as this dog of mine lurks within me
 There is no peace during my soul's journey to You.
 Either deal with its work according to the Law's injunctions,
 Or banish it completely into a salt mine.

When the king of mystics,²⁶⁴ during intimate communion with God, said, "My God, what is the way to You?" the reply came: "Rebuff your selfish soul and advance!" It became known that the selfish soul is an infidel blocking the way. Until the infidel soul is removed from the way, the heart does not become attentive. Remember that pain occurs in the heart, not clay. The weeping and wailing of seekers originates here.

O that my mother had never given birth to me,
 Then I would not have to kill my infidel soul!
 O that my name had never existed,
 And I had known neither agitation nor peace!

The work of a seeker is to engage in the greater struggle,²⁸⁵ not in an abundance of ritual prayer and fasting which make you put on weight each moment. Those who frequent taverns, drink much, don the sacred thread or enter idol temples, have all engaged in the greater struggle with their infidel souls. It has been expressed thus: "Truth is found in wine, not in grapes."²⁸⁶

By means of the tree of life in both worlds
One passes from unbelief to being a Muslim.

The same thing is put this way:
Enter an idol-temple and sit down:
Clothe it with your thread-like robe.

This is the work. Those who have been humbled and grasp the meaning of things know what this is all about. What do the inexperienced know about it?

Seekers travelling the Path to God have tasted blood:
They have served Him and rendered Him His due.
Inevitably this service made them kings:
They became the noblest people in the world.

O brother, this quest is impossible without pain and, unless a person has a heart, this pain cannot exist. Moreover, no remedy is supplied until the pain is experienced.

How can there be a remedy if there is no pain?
If you aren't a servant, how can you be given orders?
Unless you burn with the pain of self,
How can you be set aflame?
When you embrace pain you will experience its remedy:
Give your life in the hope of receiving Life!

This whole discussion can be summed up in one word: the infidel soul is blocking the way: it has to be removed so that the Way can appear.

On account of this infidel placed in our way
The number of Muslims in the world has fallen.
As long as this infidel soul lies in wait for you
How can you take the path which leads to religion?

You have to realize that it is a pressing obligation for a seeker like you to remove this infidel soul from your path. Whatever happens you have to lay hold of it, whether in the Ka'ba, or an idol-temple, or in a hermit's cell or a tavern. Take a good look at this matter, for it constitutes genuine greatness.

If the thought of my Beloved comes to me in a temple,
It would be sinful to go and walk around the Ka'ba.
If the Ka'ba contains no fragrance of Him, it's a temple:
But a temple, fragrant with union with Him, becomes my Ka'ba.

As far as this group is concerned, little importance is attached to appearance, for it is the inner reality that counts.

Where love is concerned abandon appearance
So that the sun of mystical knowledge might shine.

Everyone for whom that sun shines here,
Acquires here itself what has been promised there.

When you see a dervish or a seeker in whom you find this pain you should consider associating with him a great blessing and gird up your loins to be of service to him.

Don't for a moment withdraw your hands from His saddle-straps:
If He has accepted you, don't even think of grief!

If this doesn't happen, all you will have is personal grief in your own cell, narrating your own story, with tears of blood streaming down your cheeks, while reciting:

If You accept me, I shall be Your approved servant:
If You don't accept me, I shall be Your disgraced servant.
Whether You accept or reject me is no concern of mine:
For a while, in either state, Your attention would be mine!

A servant is concerned with service, not with lordship! What is service? It means obeying His commands. What does "being a servant" entail? Being content with what one has.

A servant is chastised until he learns correct behaviour:
How can correct service be expected from him?
Whoever desires something dishonourable
Ensnares himself in his own wretchedness.

Every misfortune comes upon a servant because he wants something. Desire, however, has nothing to do with servitude, for the Deity admits of no association. He says, "It is either you or I." "God does whatever He wishes and commands whatever He wants." He wants everything, and has trampled underfoot the desires of His servants.

Heart and mind are astonished at His glory:
Body and soul are astounded at His perfection.

Prophets, saints, kings and nobles want so many things to happen, but they don't, and vice versa. You should be content with what He has ordained. You should be resigned in everything. Servitude should be embraced for, just as a servant cannot escape from death, neither can he escape from servitude. What He wants, happens. May His glory abound! Peace!

Letter S7

ACQUIESCING TO THE DIVINE DECREE

Dear brother Khwaja Sulaiman, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines! Read them carefully and rest assured, my brother, that all is well here - by the grace and kindness of God! A messenger has arrived and explained your situation to me.

O brother, a man is sorely tried in this world. He has been brought into the world in order to be tried. There is no way of escaping from the troubles of both worlds. How could it be that one's own desire is fulfilled? In his mother's womb a man drinks blood. When he leaves this refuge and enters the abode of calamity what other diet could he have except acquiescing to the divine decree and carrying out what is determined therein? What other arrangement could there be?

You have not experienced summer's heat and winter's cold:
 You have not arrived at the door of the hidden mansion.
 Every misfortune which the soul experiences from Him,
 Whether one or a thousand, is fitting - if from Him!

It is related that the first thing to be written on the Preserved Tablet was this: "Whoever is not content with My decree, or is not patient when afflicted by Me, or shows no gratitude when blessed by Me, seeks himself - a lord other than Me!"²⁶⁷ The boldness of the intrepid ones, out of fear and terror of that news, turns to water, while their hearts are afflicted. No one feels safe by day or sleeps by night. What concern do they have about wife and children, food and clothing, or of affairs of the world, trading and agriculture - all means of securing a livelihood? They keep death before them. What a difference between them and others! It is no small undertaking to live and die as a Muslim. The purpose of those who, apart from exercising patience with regard to the divine decree, make no other arrangements, is to allow the gamble of faith to take them safely from the world - if God Most Exalted so wills! Peace!

Letter 58

FINDING FAULT WITH ACCEPTING THE POST OF JUDGE

To the chief of the ulema, Maulana Hamid ul-Millat wad-Din, from this insignificant faqir, Sharaf Maneri. Peace and salutations! O brother, read this and realize that it has come to my hearing that you have been appointed to the office of judge. You have placed yourself in great danger "with full knowledge and without restraint." It seems to me that your pursuit of knowledge, O brother, is perhaps a change for the worse. If this were not so, there would not be any disappointment in the advantages and fruits of knowledge in itself, nor would you have turned your attention from God to what is not God. It has been said clearly:

Any knowledge which does not show the way to God is ignorance.

And again:

If your acquisition of knowledge is a game,
 You make of it an instrument and a storage place.
 Knowledge takes you to the divine threshold,
 Not to selfishness, possessions and rank.

My brother, perhaps you fancy yourself among the group of judges on the Day of Resurrection. Alas, alas! How painful it is to perish when you have knowledge and learning! We seek refuge in God from that knowledge which takes us away from God

or becomes a veil along the path to Him. Whoever said the following was perfectly correct:

The bread and white robes of this world
 Increase nothing except blackness of heart.
 How can a word, which blackens a sheet of paper,
 Turn a saddened heart into a radiant one?

Take care, O take care! You have reached the end of your life. Leisure time is precious and should be utilized for oneself. Set yourself apart from this crowd. Atone for the past by repentance and seeking forgiveness. Shun the study and discussion of books dealing with points of law. Place before you the writings of the sheikhs of the Path and the sayings of the Sufis and become engrossed in God. It is hoped that, through the remembrance of God, you might escape from pandering to your selfish soul and become devoted to God instead.

As long as you pay attention to anything other than God
 The remembrance of God will remain hidden from you.
 When your every thought is of God,
 Like Majnun, everything will be Laila for you.

I would have liked to accompany you on the way to God, my brother. I write a great deal about these matters but, since you have become enamoured of rank and possessions, which are equivalent to an idol and a sacred thread, there is no point in writing anything more. These couplets of Khwaja Attar happen to be at hand.

The travellers have gone ahead, but you are left behind:
 Tie a ribbon round your head, for you remain at the door.
 Worldly occupations have blocked your way:
 You don't have a moment to attend to God.
 Awake at last from your dreamy desires:
 For a moment, O dreamy one, come to your senses!
 Until you emerge from your self, O son,
 How can God be the object of your thoughts?
 I have a word for every would-be religious person:
 A particle of this pain should be within your heart.
 The astonished are completely engrossed in His work,
 But you have no inkling of His secrets.

Letter 59

THE CLAIM TO LOVE AND THE MANIFESTATION OF FRIENDSHIP

Written to Muhammad Tughrabadi, known as *Diwana*.²⁶⁸ May God include you among His enraptured ones! Dear brother Muhammad Diwana, prayerful greetings from Sharaf Maneri! Rest assured, my brother, that your letters have reached me from time to time together with a small gift. May God grant you a good reward! Your letters contained a description of your longing. "A lover cannot but yearn." Since you

claim to love, "inevitably from evidence" is operative, for it is exceedingly easy to make a claim, but providing evidence for it is extremely difficult.

O brother, this is a matter which can break you. Be careful, for no claimant will be believed unless he provides proof. You must have heard how, when the accursed Nimrod had the Friend of God sewn up in a hide and placed in a catapult, he said: "God is my protector." The proof was immediately forthcoming. He was still in the air when Gabriel arrived. He said: "Do you need anything?" This was the proof he adduced: "Yes, but not from you!"

You will surely have heard how Harisa claimed that he had become a genuine believer. The Apostle asked for proof. "Every claim presupposes a reality. How can you prove this faith of yours?" He adduced this proof: "I have kept my soul apart from the world; I keep vigil by night and fast by day; and for me gold, silver, stones and clay are all one and the same." If Harisa had not adduced this proof he would have fallen in the estimation of the Apostle.

It is related how a person dear to God once entered a gathering of dervishes and said: "Peace be to you!" They asked him who he was. He answered: "I am a servant of the dervishes." They said to someone: "Get up and take this fellow to the bazaar and sell him." He immediately took him to the bazaar and sold him. When the purchaser took that beloved one home and saw how well he worked he was astonished. He said: "Glory be to God! How did you become a slave? O esteemed one, tell me the secret of this affair and then go and attend to your own business." He replied: "O Khwaja, I claimed to be a servant of the dervishes. They wanted to verify my claim. The proof was what you have just seen."

O brother, as far as possible travel the path of reality and eschew laying claim to anything. Otherwise, produce proof for all your claims. That, however, is not your job or mine, just as manly deeds cannot be expected from hermaphrodites. "God has created one man for struggle and another for contempt." There are those who wield the sword or are smitten by it, while there are those who clean goblets.

One needs a neck like that of Azazel²⁰⁰
 So that He may strike a blow thereon.
 The person who is honoured by His arrow
 Has eyes which act as a butt for it.

Letter 60

ASCERTAINING THE TRUTH: FEAR AND HOPE

It is better for a servant to obey commands:
 Whatever the Lord wants comes to pass.

Dear friend, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines! Read them carefully and realize that it has been reported that something has occurred in order to test you and this has made you upset. Since the world is the abode of trials and the home of calamities, who is free from such things?

The world scatters hither and thither:
It does not bestow a trace of tranquillity.

O brother, since your father, with so many robes of honour and miracles - about which you have heard - did not find refuge from testing in paradise, which is the abode of pleasures and blessings, how can his sons in the abode of this world, the home of calamities and stained with thousands of sins and impurities, possibly remain preserved from testing? Moreover, His desire tramples under foot all other desires. The very thing He wants is what happens. "What God wants, happens, and what He does not want, does not happen." You and I may have our wishes but, what God wants is what happens.

From eternity everything does what He wishes,
But human beings don't do all they should.

In very truth, God has no associate! There is no room for association in the Divinity.

O brother, there is one thing in common to prophets and saints: they want so many things to happen which don't; while there are so many things they don't want to happen, yet they do. The same applies to all sultans, nobles, kings and ministers. Undoubtedly this is what lordship and servitude is all about.

No work ever goes the way we want it to:
This, indeed, is what it means to be a servant.

O brother, if things were to happen according to the desire of a servant they would assuredly happen for prophets and saints, for they are outstanding in service. Now what can be done, because service means placing one's head at the feet of God's unfolding plan. One should be content with what the Lord wants. One should wash one's hands of one's own desires and be ready to do what one does not want to, for one's own desire and the state of servitude cannot go together.

Who knows the extent to which wisdom is at work,
Or what lies in store for every single being?

It is fitting that the well-being of a servant should consist in his not getting what he wants. He knows that "for God there is a hidden kindness."²⁷⁰ Look at the story of that excellent messenger, Joseph. The young lad was without fault yet his brothers threw him into a well. His father, a venerated messenger, suffered for years on account of his separation from him. He was taken out of the well and sold into slavery. Then he was sorely tried and taken in hand by chastity. Thereafter he was raised from slavery to rule over Egypt and his brothers were raised from sin to greatness. Finally the crown of prophethood was placed upon his head. Look at all this providential arrangement! How can it be comprehended by human thinking and understanding?

The blood of the righteous was shed in grief over this,
While the heavens rain down dust upon their heads:
Even if they seek the Way in all directions from here,
They will not advance a hair's breadth from here.

O brother, Gabriel and Michael have no knowledge at all of what He will do, so

what can be expected from you and me and the likes of us? The messenger Adam was made the object of angelic prostrations. The kingdom of paradise was bestowed upon him. He was then expelled, naked, from paradise and in the world it was proclaimed: "Adam disobeyed his Lord."

It is related that on the Day of Resurrection, when the messenger Adam enters paradise along with his children, on account of the vast multitude a cry will arise from the gates of paradise. All the angels will exclaim in astonishment: "Glory be to God! This is the man who was driven naked out of paradise." From this you will realize that it is impossible to know what divine providence has in store for a person.

You should know that, at the end of the work,
None are left except those astonished at the work.

A servant should be content in whatever state he may be, yet he should not be free from fear about what has been determined and decreed concerning him, for "a believer stands between fear and hope." This is so true that saintly men have said that a believer's hope in his Lord should be such that, if he be burdened with the sin of the seven heavens and the earth, he would not lose hope. If, on the other hand, he possessed the devotion of the seven heavens and the earth, he would not feel at ease.

It will be easy to be patient with him to this extent:
Whether pleased or not, it's all the same to You.

It is related that the renowned Righteous One said: "My hope has reached the stage that if on the Day of Resurrection a voice proclaims, 'Today only one person will enter paradise,' I would know that I was the person. On the other hand, my fear is such that if on the Day of Resurrection a voice proclaims, 'Today only one person will go to hell,' I would know that I was the person."

O brother, since the Master is all-powerful - "He enjoys unlimited power" - inevitably He has complete control. If He forgives someone and releases him from hell and makes him rejoice in attaining paradise, it would all be due to His grace. If, on the other hand, He lays hold of someone and torments him with hell, it would be just on His part, for He has control over His own possessions. Whatever He does is correct.

Anything bad of mine becomes good if You accept it:
My goodness turns to evil if You lay hold of it.

Thus it became known that there is nothing left for a servant except hope and fear. Either grace makes its appearance or justice does. If grace appears, all is well. If justice appears, everything is seized.

If You show favour of course we will all be worshippers:
But if You are just, then O, what grief is ours!

Using hand and tongue, paper and pen, bring comfort to hearts and count your leisure time as gain. Peace!

Letter 61

WORK WROUGHT THROUGH GRACE, NOT JUSTICE

Don't send me back home bereft of hope:
 I am black: make me white by Your grace.
 I have fallen on the path of hope and fear:
 I have fallen into what is black and white.

O brother, no matter what situation you are in, or what work you are doing, don't be without hope, for the Lord's works are beyond the devotion of the devout and the sins of the sinful.²⁷¹ The Holy One does whatever He wants without any intermediary cause.

It is not only devotion that is bought in all those places:
 Helplessness and weakness are also being purchased.

Thus it is that some saintly people say that a person is favoured simply because God bestows His grace upon him, not on account of what he does or what he is. Why? Because if grace depended on work then certainly previous religious communities would be more favoured than this community because they are seven or eight hundred years old, and their work and achievements were considerable when this community was only sixty or seventy years old. Its work and achievements are necessarily meagre by comparison, yet this community has been favoured by God more than all the others. In addition, if grace depended on one's nature, then Satan should have been favoured over and above Adam, for Satan is made of fire which illuminates, while Adam is made of dust which blackens. In spite of this, Adam was favoured over Satan. From this comparison we learn that grace depends neither on what one does nor on who one is. In other words, activity and nature are not the cause of grace. Thus it is proved that grace is not given to anyone except the person to whom God gives it.

O brother, since the Master is all-powerful He has complete control over things. Thus, if a person is raised up to the heights he does not arrive there through his own activity or work. Similarly, if a person is borne off to the very depths of hell he arrives there without having committed any crime or sin.

You bring forth a Friend from an idol-temple,
 Or You turn a stranger into an intimate friend.
 Another time from a house which produces jewels
 You raise up a worshipper of stone like Abu Talib.

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, was raised to the highest of heights²⁷² apart from any devotion or work on his part, even before he came into existence. On the other hand, Abu Jahl was already destined to be taken to the very depths of hell without being guilty of any sin even before he was born. It is expressed thus: "That person is in paradise without having done anything, and the other one is in hell, without having done anything either." He has no fear at all of anyone. He does whatever He wants. Fear would be involved in exercising power over what belongs to another. When control is being exercised over what belongs to oneself, what grounds for fear

could there be? All are afraid of Him, while He is afraid of nobody. If He were to bestow the integrity of the Righteous One upon the whole world, "there would be no increase in His possessions;" and if the whole world were to resound with Pharaoh's claim, "I am your great lord," there would be no diminution in His possessions.

What kind of threshold is this, having a lock without a key,
And this ocean, too deep to see where it ends?
If you plunge into this ocean for a moment,
Your inflamed heart, astonished, would see a whole World.

Letter 62

ADDUCING PROOF FOR ONE'S CLAIM TO BE A MUSLIM

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

O brother, the work is difficult. It is not easy to find a Muslim. In whatever spare time you have you should grieve over your faith for, when we say "There is no god but God" we have claimed that "apart from You there is no other." The proof of the correctness of this claim would be that we are not afraid of anyone except Him, nor do we hope in anyone except Him. If we are afraid of anyone else or put our trust in anyone else, no proof of our claim remains and a claim without proof would be a lie. Such lip-service to faith is of no avail tomorrow.²⁷³ If such faith were to count tomorrow then all the hypocrites would find release and freedom.

You became a Sufi; a sheikh; wore green; made a forty-day retreat;
You have accomplished all this, but have not yet become a Muslim!

If a physician, who is an unbeliever, tells us, "Don't eat such and such a thing as it will harm you," immediately we refrain from eating it. One hundred and twenty-four thousand messengers have come and all have said, "The love of the world is the root of all evil," yet we pass night and day in pursuit of the world. Thus it is that we believe in an unbelieving physician but not in 124,000 prophets. Tell me, where is faith in all this?

My brow is calloused from prostrating before the path of idols:
In this situation how can I claim to be a Muslim?

If someone is looking at me I cannot commit a sin while he is watching me, yet if the Lord is looking at me, daily I commit a hundred sins in full view of Him. The reason for this is that, although I am afraid of human beings who are created, I am not afraid of the Lord. Now tell me: If a person is afraid of a creature but not of the Lord, is he a believer or an unbeliever?

Tomorrow you'll feel the after-effects of tonight's intoxication.

Everyone has been adversely affected by this. People still ask me to write something, but what? If I am to write anything, it is simply what I have written. Study these few lines carefully. That's all! And keep your distance from unstable people who are still like infants at the breast.

O brother, in the opinion of men of insight, those people who consider themselves real men are still in their mothers' wombs; or rather, are still sperm in their fathers' loins; or even more precisely, are still in the world of nothingness. "And He will let them blunder along blindly in their sin" (Q2:15).

Whoever is satisfied with himself even for a moment
Will be imprisoned in hell for many a year.

Letter 63

THE EFFORT TO GROW IN LOVE AND BE SHAPED BY IT

I reached an ocean with man-devouring waves:
Alas, no boat or boatman was upon that ocean!

The boat upon this ocean is love and the boatman on it is the divine assistance.
Become a disciple and let love alone be your guide.

Since the fears and dangers of this Way are of various kinds, what should be done? Keep the letters and recorded discourses²⁷⁴ of this helpless one before you. It is hoped that, by studying them, you may be enabled to cope with the buffeting of the terrifying waves of this ocean and thus reach safety. You should seek therein the solution to every problem confronting you as you traverse this ocean for, my brother, when you have studied the meaning of these records and letters and become acquainted with the laws and hints contained therein, you will imagine they are coming from the lips of the writer, for "the pen is one of two tongues."²⁷⁵ Collect your wits for it is your good fortune, brother, to have the resolve to tackle this ocean. May you be successful, assisted by the Prophet and his most honourable descendants!

It is better for a crocodile to contend with the ocean,
Than to leap like little fish at the edge of a pond.

The pearls of this ocean are precious. Its jewels are exquisite. Whoever plunges into it should be a genuine lover who plays with his life, not an ass, hermaphrodite, unwashed face or glutton.

Run off and play! Being a lover is not for you!

Lovers are different from hermaphrodites, and their religion and way of life are also different.

In asceticism one needs pulpit and direction of prayer:
In love there is naught but wine and sacred thread.

Anyone who has not known love has not experienced its madness either. Whether it be a question of a day or an hour, that is a person's real life! Sheikh Abdullah Ansari²⁷⁶ said:

Strive in order to experience it for a moment
So that your eyes may instantly sparkle.
In heaven and earth gaze at none except God:
Let your life-long striving be for such a moment.

If in life I spend but a moment with You
 This would be my life: the rest would pass away.

O brother, the robe of love is not itself bestowed upon everybody, nor is everybody fit for love. Whoever is fit for it is ready for God, while whoever is not fit for love is not ready for God. Those intimately acquainted with love know what sort of a condition love is, but what can those lacking in this intimacy and hermaphrodites know about the quality of the love of lovers?

In love's lane, how can wine be given to the pious?
 How can a draught from yearning's cup be given to strangers?
 How can the robe meant for special people be given,
 Without love's gallows, to those who frequent bazaars?

Countless people seek paradise, but you won't find anyone who is seeking love. The reason for this is that paradise is the portion of the selfish soul, while love is the portion of one's inner soul. Thousands are seeking pearl-like shells, yet no such seeker finds any pearl therein! O brother, rise above yourself and greet yourself with love.

When you greet yourself with it, you will have arrived.²⁷⁷
 When you are wholly consumed by this flame,
 The stain of Nimrod becomes the garden of Abraham.

Just look at the courage of those who fear God! Anything which is other than the quest for God is an idol or sacred thread. Their direction for prayer and pulpit is the gibbet.²⁷⁸

Play with your head, if you are struggling after Him:
 Along this Way you play with nothing less than your head.

Do you know why all these curtains and veils are placed along the Way? It is to exercise, day by day, the eyes of a lover so that they can acquire the strength to bear the vision of the unveiled Friend!

A saintly man leapt out of a tavern,
 Holding a wine-filled pitcher in his hand.
 Impelled by love he abandoned asceticism
 And broke with repentance for the sake of union.

It is related that the Messenger once asked Gabriel, "Have you seen the Lord?" He replied: "O Muhammad, there are seventy veils of light between Him and me. If one of these veils of light were to be shown to me, I would be burnt to cinders." Now just look at the courage and valour of water and clay! In the strength of "I breathed of My spirit into him"²⁷⁹ (Q15:29) he²⁸⁰ says: "Show Yourself to me so that I may gaze upon You" (Q7:143)! If this were not so, then who is he²⁸¹ and what does his question mean?

Man is not simply a mixture of water and clay:
 He has a head, upright stature and a pure soul.
 A hundred worlds full of angels are in existence:
 What can they do except prostrate before this mixture?

Letter 64

THE MEANING OF THE TRADITION “O THAT MUHAMMAD’S LORD HAD NOT CREATED MUHAMMAD!”

Brother, your letter reached me after some delay. I read it carefully. What happened has now been made clear. It is good that you told me about it. I have some remarks to make. O brother, when the address, “If it were not for you,²⁸² the Deity would not have been made manifest,” reached the lord of the world, he looked around keenly and saw on all sides a hundred thousand who were saying “Show me!” (Q7:143) and were seeking union, their heads turned in jealousy. That was when he said: “O that Muhammad’s Lord had not created Muhammad!” Wherever there is love there is jealousy. The stronger the love the more intense the jealousy. Thus a dervish, caught up in this state, said: “O Lord, on the Day of Resurrection raise everyone up blind so that, except for me, nobody else may be able to see You!” On another occasion he said: “O Lord, raise me up blind on the Day of Resurrection so that not even these eyes of mine might see You!” It is not fitting that there should be anything to distract the mind at this stage.

The task of a lover involves disturbance:
 This stems from being inattentive in friendship.
 Inevitably a madman, even though it be sinful,
 Blarts out rudely what he has to say.
 Whether good or evil, since it's all from there,
 The sayings of a madman are considered meaningful.

Again the lord of the world, in the intimate disclosure of “He created my light from His light,” saw an activity and a word. Because of the activity and the word that he saw he wanted the name of his own existence to be erased. He said: “O that Muhammad’s Lord had not created Muhammad!” If the word ‘from’ did not come between the words which follow the verb ‘created,’ ‘my light’ would not differ from ‘His light.’

O brother, if a lover is not worthy of the Beloved then, according to the law of love, it would be lawful for him to desire his own non-existence.²⁸³

When you don't find love within you,
 O half-alive one, smitten by love:
 It is better that, out of shame,
 No trace of your existence remains.

Moreover, by way of example, if a man invites a friend to a meal and, uninvited, ten or twenty other men accompany him, then these uninvited guests enter the home of the host in an improper manner. His friend feels beside himself with shame. He plainly says to his host: “How I wish I were not your guest!” With this firmly fixed as a basis for comparison you will be able to understand that God, the Glorified and Exalted One, has brought the entire world into existence as the uninvited companion of the blessed essence of the lord of the apostles. “If it were not for you, why would I have created the two worlds?” They became an uninvited group lacking in proper behaviour, being responsible for things which should never have been. Their

occurrence caused him to feel greatly ashamed, impelling him to say: "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad!"

All these meanings are explained in the *Lawa'iḥ* of Maulana Hamiduddin Nagori,²⁸⁴ while that lover lost in God, Ain ul-Quzat Hamadani, says that it is possible to understand the condition in which the Apostle said, "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad!" Moreover, what he says is echoed by a saintly man: "I would rather be sawn in two than say of anything, 'O that it had not happened!'" This occurs at a special stage for, when a person has attained his own perfection, no earthly pleasures or selfish desires remain in him. Whether he be a dervish or a wealthy man, whether he be hungry or full, whether he be healthy or sick, in every state he would be content with his Friend. He is not attuned to his own pleasures, nor do his selfish desires prompt him to say, "I wish it would turn out like this!" or "I wish it wouldn't be like this!" Whatever he does is done because he knows that the good pleasure of his Beloved is found therein.

If he sees something within himself, however, which is against the good pleasure of the Beloved, it is not fitting for him to be content with the continued existence of that defect. Rather his every effort will be to remove it. His continual prayer would be, "O that I did not have this defect!" If it were not like this, all the laws of the prophets would be rendered fruitless. What would you say if a person drinks wine or commits adultery? He does not say, "O that I had not drunk!" or "O that I had not committed adultery!" For some people saying this would be contrary to being content with the divine decree. This is not at all so! Contentment with the divine decree is found in whatever God is pleased with. Since He is not pleased with unbelief and sins, here contentment is not in question. Thus it is proper for the prophets to say, "O that so-and-so were not an unbeliever!" or "O that he were not a sinner!" They are content with His good pleasure but indignant whenever He is.

Letter 65

FIRM RESOLVE AND THE QUEST OF THE LORD

Peace be to you, and also the mercy and blessings of God!

If that rosy face with its wine-red lips becomes yours,
Why bother about obtaining a stream-filled garden?

Firm resolve is purified of this world and the next. This includes everything covered by "Be submissive." The mark of newness is stamped on existence. Idol and sacred thread are accounted as one's own way, which agrees with the following:

Of what use is life without union with You?
Of what use is the world without Your beauty?

That genuine seeker, Malik-i Dinar,²⁸⁵ has written in his *Munajat*. "O my God, since You grant me entrance into paradise and have said, 'O Malik, I am pleased with you,' then turn me into dust at that hour and bestow paradise upon those who deserve it." Imagine such manly resolve!

Whoever came with firm resolve became a man,
 Standing alone, like the sun, because so high.
 Whoever entered upon this Way with firm resolve
 Came like a king, even though he had to beg.

The one intoxicated with the divine "Am I not divine," Ain ul-Quzat Hamadani, used to say: "Eating and drinking here and eating and drinking there cannot be compared, but vision of the Wealth has not been granted in this age since 'I have prepared for My faithful servant those things which no eye has seen, or ear heard, or anyone has even thought of.'" What room is there for bread and water, O irresolute one!

Whoever has not lost Him like a Joseph,
 Even if he believes, doesn't really believe.
 Even if the whole world is turned upside down,
 Don't emerge from the shade of Joseph!

O brother, many people in this world seek the blessings of paradise and are on the lookout for miracles, but seekers of the Beneficent, the One who bestows honours, have become as rare as the philosopher's stone.

The Lord has come as the Ka'ba of lovers:
 Majnun has come face to face with Laila.
 As far as possible, remain a stranger to your intellect:
 Chasten your intellect, and become a foolish fellow.

The one seeking Him has this wealth: "O David, when you see someone seeking Me, become his servant." Glory be to God for the fact that, when the messenger David was a servant, earth and sky were in attendance on him. What news did men and jinn have of him? Khwaja Ahmad Ghazali²⁶⁶ says:

As long as the world-revealing cup is in my hands,
 It seems to the intellect that the spheres heed me.
 Since there is no direction of prayer, all turn to me:
 The most enlightened people in the world are intoxicated with me.

O brother, as long as a seeker has two purposes in view, even if he is journeying towards the world of oneness, without a doubt he is still enmeshed in worldly affairs. What is One he sees as two.

Until a person has entirely died to self
 Proof of his non-existence has not been established.
 Believing in One is not incarnation: it is your non-existence:
 Apart from foolish talk, man does not become God.

My dear friend, the mount of love is a very strong one. In one swift motion it emerges from the two worlds and canters about in the world of Necessary Being.

If you come to labour in His world
 Your name will be entered in the log-book of love.
 Trustworthy Gabriel would be your groom
 If you come seated on the mount of love.

Nevertheless, a seeker has to shoulder the burden involved so that, one day, he may be borne to the door of the Sought One. The path thereto, however, is by way of the gallows.

If the path of loving You involves the gallows,
It would be easy, my son, not difficult.
Why fear the thorns? What are they to him?
His heart's Beloved is among the roses!

He is not far from you: "And He is with you, a sign to you." You are far from Him, since you are veiled by your self. When you emerge from thinking and worrying about your own being, you will recite these lines:

I was beholding my Beloved, but knew it not:
I was in between, but knew it not.
I said, 'Seek,' yet I had arrived!
Self was scattering, but I knew it not.

The secret which evokes yearning in those who yearn is this: "It is related concerning God Most Exalted: 'You are not: I am, and none other than Me.'"

You do not become Him yet, if you strive,
You will reach a place where 'you are' will depart.
Don't be astonished at the rain of love and the seed of affection:
It is like verdure from the clay of Mahmud if Ayaz appears.

Letter 66

KEEPING SECRETS: REFRAINING FROM SPEAKING: REMAINING FAR FROM THINKING: UNDERSTANDING IDOLS AND SACRED THREADS

O brother, your letter reached me. It was carefully perused. What it intimated and hinted at was perceived. The contents and meaning of the verses quoted were grasped. O brother, imitating our predecessors is a blessed thing. "Divulging the secrets of the Deity is to play the infidel." Their command is:

If, intoxicated, he gives a hint about His love,
His recompense along the Way would be the gallows.

It is forbidden to speak or write about the secrets of the Deity, exalting them and explaining them openly. The Law does not permit this. Only hints and intimations, "enticing and exciting," are allowed.

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
In their innermost hearts they strive for self-effacement.
At each breath they drink wine offered by the Friend:
They play with their heads, yet conceal the divine secret.

This work requires swallowing but no belching. Speaking, writing, desires and revelations are what is meant by belching. The real man is he who swallows oceans

yet does not belch. I am the slave of any such bold and strong man who is not satisfied with any perfection whatsoever. Khwaja Yahya Mu'az Razi wrote: "Here is a person who drank a drop and became intoxicated." The king of mystics wrote in reply: "Here is one who swallowed oceans and cried out for more."

As an Ocean of love exists without limits,
Inevitably thirst also increases without limits.
As long as you don't experience this pain,
It would be shameful to call you a man.

There are some, however, who are compelled to write or speak. For example, Ain ul-Quzat has said: "This secret will either involve the tongue or the pen. But what should I do? I am desperate. Even if I don't want to write or speak, I cannot stop myself!" Thus he became a person who spoke out. It is fitting that he be excused.

Whatever is done by one maddened with love
Is quickly forgiven, coming from such a one.

As long as a person is preoccupied with self he is at a distance; he has not attained union or oneness.

As long as you are enmeshed with self, you see all as disparate:
When you have been transformed, you will see all as One.

If such things are found on somebody's tongue or are penned in the world of oneness, the person concerned should be excused.

Inevitably for one mad with love, even if he be at fault,
Whatever he says flows from full freedom.

Concerning all this the sheikhs, who are worthy of imitation and far from blame, have spoken in words similar to those of someone who spoke 'without any veil, allusion or sign': "These are ecstatic utterances: they are neither to be rejected nor accepted." When holy men, however, have journeyed from the city of self and have been of service to the people, it is like this. After having been freed from their own work they are adorned with all possible perfections and become spiritually wealthy and greatly blessed, thus attaining the rank about which it was said:

An intermediary has arisen for this people:
Without a doubt his word is true.
When he no longer sees 'other' except as symbolic,
He hears everything from Him and that he repeats.

O brother, prosperous works do not proceed from those who turn away, just as manly activity does not proceed from hermaphrodites. "Everything for which he was created has been made easy for him." What sort of a dog is this person that such a thought should occur to him?²⁸⁷ There should rather be somebody to remove the sacred thread of his selfish soul from around his neck and make a genuine Muslim of him. If the Lord makes the journey easy it is for this purpose and will remain so till the Last Day.

Brother, you and others dear to God address me as “king of mystics” or “prince of sheikhs” or similar such titles, but this luckless one knows himself and recognizes himself for what he is. “Hearing is not the same as seeing.” More than thirty or forty years have passed in thinking about belief in One God, being a Muslim, polytheism, hypocrisy, sacred threads and one’s selfish soul. Perhaps he²⁸⁸ will arrive at belief in One God and genuine faith by the time he reaches the grave. At least this world has been understood and seen for what it is.

You still know nothing about your unbelief:
How can you know the realities of faith?

May a thousand mercies be bestowed upon his soul! At least since he has set out on this Way the unbelief, polytheism, hypocrisy, idol and sacred thread of a selfish soul - which is hidden - have been seen. He has spoken about what he has seen. May God have mercy upon him! Inevitably the work has come back to this: concerning himself this couplet continuously comes to mind:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

God willing, may I one day become the uninvited companion of all the Unitarians and believers in One God and in real faith!

O brother, if verbal expressions of belief and faith would suffice for anyone on the Last Day, then all the hypocrites would feel secure, leap for joy and enter paradise. Well, “one word leads to another,” making this letter somewhat long, and I know it is all the pleasure of the selfish soul. “God forgive me! God forgive me! God forgive me!” May you come to a good end! Peace!

Letter 67

THE WISDOM OF THE LORD AND THE SUBJECTION OF SERVANTS

Dear friend, special greetings and prayers from Sharaf Maneri! I have heard that you have returned from Daulatabad.²⁸⁹ Please God all went well and came to a successful conclusion! O brother, what He wants overrules all other desires. What He wants is what happens.

The wolf culled from the flock the one his heart desired,
And thus derided the haughtiness of the shepherds.

“What God wants to happen, does, but what He doesn’t want to happen, doesn’t.” The prophets, saints, kings and nobles have all fallen within the ambit of this dictum. They wanted so many things to happen which didn’t, while so many other things happened which they didn’t want to happen. This is what lordship and servitude refer to. Without a doubt for many years the Apostle desired that Abu Talib be granted the gift of faith until the command came: “You do not guide the one you love” (Q28:56). The messenger Noah prayed thus concerning his son: “Lord, my son was my own flesh and blood and Your promise is surely true” (Q11:45). Then the injunction came: “Noah, he no longer belongs to your family” (Q11:46)!

If things went entirely according to the desire of a servant it would mean that, in servitude, servants had the ultimate say. How could this be so? Servitude means bowing one's head before the divine decree. One should be content with whatever the Lord wants and wash one's hands of any personal desire. One should act without any such desire.

Act thus: be patient, it will be easy:
 Being happy or not will be the same for you.
 Each day life passes by with its perplexities,
 Whether one is happy or not, life still passes by.

It is fitting that the integrity of a servant should be in his not desiring, for He knows what the integrity of a servant consists in better than the servant does, for "the kindness of God lies hidden."

People know He is intelligent,
 For what He does is good.
 Drink, even if it be poison from Him,
 Whether it be ugly or good, all is good.

Look at the story of the messenger Joseph. A young lad is thrown into a well by his brothers, although he has done no wrong and his old father, a messenger, is grief-stricken at being separated from him. His brothers afterwards drew him out of the well and sold him into slavery and sent him away from that place. He was completely innocent. He was raised from slavery to being the ruler of Egypt. As for his brothers, they were eventually raised from sin to the dignity of being crowned with prophethood! He arranged all these things and gave them a particularly precious name.²⁹⁰ This is beyond the imagining or comprehension of anyone.

The secret which reaches there offers up its head:
 The intellect which reaches there experiences fullness.

O brother, neither Gabriel nor Michael has knowledge of the secret of what He is planning, so what can be expected from you and me and the likes of us? Angels were made to prostrate before the messenger Adam and the kingdom of paradise, together with flocks, was given to him. Then he was driven, bare-headed, from his paradise and a proclamation was made throughout the world: "Adam has disobeyed his Lord" (Q20:12).

No one is aware of the secret of the work,
 Because there is no path thereto for anyone.

Following the Resurrection, when the prophet Adam enters paradise together with his descendants, a great cry will arise at the gates on account of the vast multitude. All the angels will cry out in astonishment: "Glory be to God! This is the very same man who was driven naked from paradise!"

On the Night of Ascent 120,000 prophets cried out "Make way! Make way!" in front of the king of prophets and the crown of Sufis, mounted on Buraq.²⁹¹ During the conflict with the Qurayza and Nadir²⁹² he was seated on a small ass. The reins were made of twisted date leaves and the pack-saddle was also made of date leaves.

Once the key of both treasures²⁹³ was flung upon the earth in front of him. He was told: "This is yours. Use it as you wish." Furthermore, in order to borrow a few measures of barley he knocked at the door of a Jew. "Lend me some," he said, and the Jew let fly this arrow: "You have no camels or sheep, fields or gardens: how will you repay me?"

At times I experience plenty, at times I am in need:
 At times my heart is joyful, at times it is distraught.
 At times I'm behind all, at times out in front:
 I myself am the chameleon of the age.

It should be understood, O brother, that being a servant and wanting one's own way are completely incompatible. If you want union it means waiving your own desire because all the dissipation, grief and sorrow of the people of today come from wanting their own way. Most certainly seeking what is deceptive leads to all this.

Letter 68

LOVE OF THE POOR AND INDIGENT TOGETHER WITH SIGNS AND PROOFS

My dearest brother, so precious to me, Malik ul-Umara,²⁹⁴ the peace of God be with you! May you be adorned and honoured with love for the poor and indigent! O brother, the secret of all happiness and the origin of all a believer's wealth - after faith - is the love of the poor and those who depend upon God. The petition made by the king of the prophets and the crown of the saints to the Lord of dignity was this: "O Lord, may I live and die with the indigent, and raise me up tomorrow together with them."

Although Solomon is involved in such a vast work,
 Since he rules from earth to the divine throne.
 When He recognized the extent of your indigence,
 He provided sustenance from basket weaving.

O brother, kings are tested by means of God's poor and needy. Their rule and influence are not restricted to this world or the next. If anyone asks where its limits lie, say: "In that desert which is called the desert of divine oneness and in the expanse which is known as the expanse of divine lordship." Since their rule and influence is as you have just heard, clothe yourself with the name of poverty and indigence so that the gaze of none may fall on your rule and influence. Of all possible names choose these for yourself and secure relief for the people from their troubles and headaches.

So that people may not know who he is, deceptively
 He sat in an idol-temple, having donned a sacred thread.

O brother, it is certain that the seed of this love, sown in the soil of the heart of anyone today, is good news for him, for tomorrow it will be said of him: "Whoever loves a people will be raised up by God in their midst on the Day of Resurrection."

Whatever the condition and pursuit of people when they die,
 Since all are eternal, they will have to be borne forever.

This good news is confirmed by the observation that Ibn Mas'ud made. "A man came to the Messenger and said: 'O Apostle of God, what would you say concerning someone who loves a people yet is unable to reach them?' He replied: 'Whoever loves someone is with him' by virtue of love. 'And he is with you wherever you are' is itself made complete." The Companions said: "After the advent of Islam there had never been rejoicing such as occurred on the day he said, 'a man is with the one he loves.'" People thanked the man with offerings of clothing and gold and silver coins and said: "This wealth is for us and for all Muslims till the Day of Resurrection on account of you."

You are athirst beside an ocean, yet remain apart:
You are seated on a treasure, and yet are begging.

Among the writings of the sheikhs one reads, in connection with certain individuals, that the person is in the east or the west and yet is right next to us. This means that, by virtue of love, no matter how far to the east or west he appears to be, he is beside us.

Nevertheless whenever anyone claims to love this group he should ensure that he adduces some sign or proof. A mere claim proves nothing without any evidence. A dervish once entered an assembly of dervishes. They said: "Who are you?" He replied: "I am a slave of the dervishes." The dervishes gave a signal to one of their number to get up, take the man to the market and sell him. The man immediately got up, took the dervish to the market and sold him. When the nobleman who purchased him took him home and observed his demeanour and the quality of his work, he said: "How can you possibly be a slave? Tell me the secret of what this is all about and go and do your own work." He replied: "Khwaja, I had claimed to be a slave of the dervishes. They wanted evidence. What you have seen is the evidence."

Letter 69

CONCEALING THE SECRET, AND THE PERPLEXITY OF THE PEOPLE

The peace, mercy and blessing of God be with you! The prayer-mat you sent reached me. It has been gratefully accepted. "May God reward you!" I have also read carefully what was written concerning the world of rapture.²⁹⁵ It is bound up with the following couplet:

Whatever is done by a person madly in love
Is quickly forgiven as the act of a madman.

O brother, this is not surprising. It is fitting that, exteriorly, a letter should be addressed to a particular person while, interiorly, the intention of a devout person could be different, because the divine decree for such a one holds many astonishing things in store. It makes of one a writer and of another an addressee. Neither is the writer aware of the reality of the work, nor is the addressee aware of the impact of the secret of the work.

If you have knowledge and yet don't know,
At the end your work is to be perplexed.

Don't you see that the hand and pen are suspicious of the writer. They don't know what his purpose is. The paper is suspicious of "the letter on it." It is not aware of the secret of the work. One plucks and another eats; one weaves and another wears; one is made to intend something regarding some work, but another is made to benefit from it. "God favours some of you with more than He bestows on others."

What can anyone do? O brother, neither Gabriel nor Michael knows what the divine decree has in store for anyone. As for you and me, who are we? "God invites to the abode of Islam." The invitation was common, but the guidance turned out to be special. "He guides whomsoever He wishes."

No one is aware of the secret of the work,
Because no one has access thereunto.

O brother, "God created some men for struggle and others for plates and dishes of bread." One person is so bold that daily he throws the lasso of seeking around the tip of the divine throne, while another is such that two pieces of bread suffice to fill his stomach, imagining that he has acquired dominion over both worlds. What arrangement is needed for all this! Destiny is from all eternity, as has been said:

No one is aware of Reality:
All die empty-handed.

Just as the food required by the human stomach is known and measured out, so too the food needed for the human heart and soul is also known and apportioned. "What is known is unchangeable, and what is apportioned neither increases nor decreases." One should break one's pen, seal one's lips and say: "God does what He wants and orders what He intends."

Who has such beauty that, out of fear of You,
He can move his tongue except in praise of You.

God willing, may what has been learnt and understood from those letters

sent to you, brother, actually become your state and delight, and may this helpless one gain a portion as your uninvited companion. "A drowning man will grab at any straw." The object of the writing has not been placed in front of this helpless one. He simply guides people towards the royal banquet. The poor cook burns his hands and feet, while someone else eats what he has prepared.

Letter 70

THE DISPLACEMENT AND HELPLESSNESS OF REASON IN COMPARISON TO THE COMMAND OF THE GLORIOUS, EXALTED LORD

Dear friend, special prayers and greetings! O brother, today's enemies are closely associated with prosperity, while the saints are intimately linked to misfortune. The authority of reason is here subverted. Reason is the instrument of analogy, but divinity is not correctly perceived by analogy, for divinity depends on the will of God, not on the analogy of servants. Don't you see that no rational being can do anything but experience helplessness therein. God Most Exalted has created so many thousands of kinds of creatures but, for Him, there is no kind of dependence on them at all. Moreover nobody makes friends to no avail, or provokes enmity without incurring harm. This is what reason teaches. As for the Lord, however, He derives no advantage from someone, yet loves him, and although He is not harmed by someone, yet He has enmity towards him.²⁹⁶

Reason also teaches us to look after friends and treat them kindly, but to mistreat or ignore enemies. God, the Exalted and Glorified, however, reserves calamities for His friends and bestows upon His enemies whatever they wish. Reason teaches us not to make enemies but, if one appears on the scene, he is to be destroyed, unless that is not possible. God Most Exalted, however, creates enemies and looks after them. He does not destroy them but treats them kindly. Since there is no scope for analogy, what can reason say about divinity? It fails on account of its inherent inability. What it has to say about divinity is turned upside down.

Reason is but one word in His register:

The selfish soul is nothing but a footman at His door.

It has also been expressed thus. Reason acted. The whole world came to be. Having looked at creation, it passed on, for reason is created and defective. What is created and defective is not in control but has dependent and defective power like itself. Reason has been created in order to discover how one should serve God.²⁹⁷ If there were no reason, people would not know how to serve

God properly. There is no question of being able to know the divinity of the Lord by means of analogical reasoning!

Reason is needed to know how to serve:
 It is your soul which has to play the leading role.
 O you who are unable to know yourself,
 How can you possibly know the Deity?
 Since you are weak in knowledge of yourself,
 How can you possibly know God Omnipotent?

No matter how accurate a balance reason is, a banker cannot weigh a mountain with a balance!

O brother, neither Gabriel nor Michael knows the secret of the divine decree: what access could there be for helpless reason? What path is there for the human mind and understanding? The first words written on the Preserved Tablet are: "I am God. There is no god besides Me. My mercy has outstripped my anger. Whoever does not heed my decree or bear my afflictions with patience seeks a lord other than Me." You should bow in humble submission before whatever befalls you. What else can you do? This is what servitude entails!

It is better for a slave to be obedient,
 Than obtain from the Lord what he wants.

Night and day say: "Lord, I have wronged myself greatly" (Q27:44). Forgive my sins, for none can forgive great sins except the Exalted Lord."

Don't gather around an idol at the divine threshold:
 Through humility you will become a man of this Way.

Letter 71

THE QUALITIES OF MANLY PEOPLE AND THE BLAMEWORTHINESS OF HERMAPHRODITES

Some people are dumbstruck along the path of certainty:
 Others are caught up in the sorrow of religion.
 I am afraid of that voice which will resound one day:
 O unknowing ones, the Way is neither this nor that.

I felt much affection for you when your letter arrived, dear friend! I realized that "hearts desire and consciences inspire while God, by His grace, provides the occasions for meeting." O brother, what is this you are writing and saying, that the religion of the manly is one thing, and that of hermaphrodites is something else?

Asceticism involves pulpit and a direction for finding:
 In love there is nothing but wine and sacred thread.
 If you really are a lover, you will burden the gallows:
 Otherwise be seated: talking counts for nothing.

What can be done? "God has created some for waging war and others for plates and dishes of bread." Thousands of believers in One God are carried to the cemetery, and yet not one seeker of God is placed upon the bier. Compared to the seekers of this world, those who seek the next are few in number. Compared to the seekers of paradise, those who seek God - the "People of God," as they are called - are even fewer. Inevitably it happens like this. Today all of us want to be leaders with miraculous powers and are lovers of rank and personal comfort. What do we hermaphrodites have to do with the traditions of real men? "The food of all birds depends entirely on their gullets, and have you seen a barber who is able to challenge kings in the exercise of their powers?"

Once Imam Shibli disappeared from his living quarters. His companions went in search of him. Finally they found him. He was wearing the dress of hermaphrodites and was seated in their midst. In consternation they cried out: "O Master of the Path, what is this all about?" He replied: "I don't have the form of a woman, nor am I a man. I must be a hermaphrodite."

Although a foolhardy man laughs at this work,
 A wise man is pleased with nothing else than this.
 The path of religion is not a trade or commentary:
 Apart from evil there is no other monument therein.

O brother, fasting and ritual prayer, reading the Quran and reciting litanies, seclusion and retirement are all praiseworthy deeds and works. All believers are privileged to perform them, "but engaging in seeking is the real business." To put it succinctly, seeking God is quite another activity. He is not attained by means of the world or the last things, nor by means of the body or the soul.

For one who catches a trace of His scent,
 What are both worlds? He would call them 'dust.'
 O hermaphrodite, go! This is no place for you:
 The love of God has nothing to do with hermaphrodites.

"Faith is naked." In the world of unity, leading or following, guiding or being guided are all additions and embellishments. The writer of the following lines has hinted at this:

No worship of self is found in the religion of love:
 People who are alert don't purchase intoxicants.
 If you give a gift in the world of intimate knowledge,
 Proceed without name or sign, for being is not purchased.

"And God Most Exalted revealed to David: 'O David, whoever seeks Me will find Me, and whoever seeks another will not find Me.'"

A man should have neither head nor foot:
 All things are lost in him, and he in God.

Sheikh Abu Sa'id²⁹⁸ has said: "When you really want to see God in your own heart, cleanse it of everything else. A king will certainly not enter a house filled with nonsense and ribaldry. He chooses for his dwelling a house where no one else dwells except Him, and you cannot be in it along with Him." There may be many thousands seeking paradise but the person who seeks God is precious in both this world and the next. And why shouldn't he be? "God Most Exalted sent a revelation to David: 'O David, when you see someone seeking Me, you should become his servant.'" O brother, the one who has come has done so adorned with "You are for Me and I am for you, whether you like it or not." The work is His, the burden is His.

If there ware an open road from Him to you,
 You would be able to boast of this wealth.

For us and the likes of us "for you there is a portion in the religion of the weak" is fulfilled. If there is nothing to this tradition except writing and speaking, then nothing has been appointed. The composer of the following has spoken well:

I am the lamp which illuminates the world for one and all:
 I illuminate the world and am myself consumed.
 I also say: "Don't give your heart to a nobody!"
 I myself do not heed what I teach the people.

"I seek refuge in God! I seek refuge in God" for writing and speaking thus! There was no way I could escape from replying to the letter. What I said and wrote formed my reply. If anything written here is not acceptable to God, then I seek forgiveness for it and for everything, not only for these words. If an inkling of this pain were to take hold of you one day you would quickly become a disciple of love, for love is the guide par excellence. "There is no guide more excellent than love."

Become a disciple with love as your guide!

Those who seek God know about the state of love. For example:

Youthfulness abounds in the world of the guide:
Become a lover, for love's profit is bountiful.

Also:

A poor ant wanted to go to the Ka'ba:
It caught hold of a pigeon's foot, and was suddenly there.

That pigeon is love!

The pain of love came as a balm for every heart:
No problem has ever been solved apart from love.

Letter 72

MEETING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE AND BRINGING COMFORT TO GOD'S SERVANTS

Dear brother Malik Mufarrih, having authority from God Most Exalted, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Yahya Maneri, known as Sharaf. Brother, your situation became clear after reading your letter. O brother, the son of Zacharia brought it together with mementos, a woollen garment and a towel. "May God receive you favourably and grant you a good end!"

O brother, "this world is the field of the next." As far as possible you should be occupied with your work, making use of your hands and tongue, pen and paper, money and goods in order to bring comfort to hearts²⁹⁹. Realize that this is a great work.

There are so many faults, misfortunes and calamities in the world that, even if books were written, a tenth part of them would not be mentioned. In spite of all this your virtue is like a field prepared for the next life.

A holy man was asked how many ways there were to God Most Exalted. He replied: "There are as many ways to the Lord as there are particles of existence, but there is none that leads more intimately or more efficaciously than bringing comfort to hearts." I have found Him in this way and have charged my disciples to follow it.³⁰⁰

O brother, the command of the Law is: "Whoever meets the need of a brother Muslim will have seventy of his own needs met by God." The Prophet

has said: "Whoever clothes a believer with a garment will be clothed by God Most Exalted with a thousand robes on the Day of Resurrection. God will also meet a thousand of his needs and will attribute to him a year's worship. He will also forgive all his sins, even if they are as many as the stars of heaven. God will also give him light for every hair on his body and will remove from him the torments of the grave. He will write a decree preserving him from the fire of hell and enabling him to cross the bridge of Sirat and will provide protection from the troubles of That Day."

How can this wealth be found in supererogatory prayer and fasting? Thus it happened that a holy man was told in an assembly: "The king of this city stays awake at night and performs supererogatory ritual prayer." He replied: "The unfortunate man has lost his way and has undertaken the work of others." Those present said: "O Sheikh, how could this be so?" He replied: "Because the path that he should be travelling is that of providing various kinds of food to the hungry and different kinds of clothes to the naked; of filling desolate hearts with consolation; and providing the necessities of life for those in need. Performing supererogatory prayers and keeping vigil of a night is the work of dervishes. Everyone should work according to his own vocation."

O brother, find a heart that is broken and fill it with consolation. This would be better than passing the night in vigil. Anything which is broken has no value except the human heart. The more broken it is, the more valuable it is. It is related that Moses, engrossed in communion with God, said: "My God, where should I look for You?" The reply came: "Seek Me close to the broken-hearted." He said: "My God, today there is no heart more broken than mine." The reply came: "I am there."

Finally, O brother, you must have heard how Rabi'a of Basra received so much wealth and so many blessings for giving a little water to a thirsty dog. You should strive to ensure, however, that whatever is given to anyone is bestowed without its being asked for. It is said that a request, no matter how modest it be, is worth the gift, even if this be quite substantial. No matter how much is given it will be considered as little, for the entire world itself is but little.

It is related that Imam Shibli said: "If the whole world belonged to me alone I would make a morsel of it and pop it into the mouth of a dervish. Still I feel pity for it."

Letter 73

THE QUALITIES OF THE SOUL AND THEIR IMPACT

O brother, since the spirit³⁰¹ is the representative of God it is endowed with divine lustre. In this state it begins to claim, "I am God" upon seeing all existing beings in prostration before the throne of its vicegerency. It knows the Lord is God yet, fixing its gaze on this tradition, "When God illuminates something it becomes lost in Him," it becomes astonished. This is simply a touch. Thousands of seekers, after cutting off the remaining outward forms, are killed here. Thus it is that the final disturbance along the Path to God lies in this very lustre. If this lustre, which is bestowed upon the seeker, makes him fall completely in love with himself, he has ceased to travel along the Path.³⁰² "What distorted vision!" becomes applicable to him.

A real man passes beyond this disturbance and reaches the shade of perfect wealth, the reality of the work. Here he realizes who is a lover of miracles; who is a lover of being respected; who is a seeker of favours; and who is a seeker of benefits. One beloved of God said: "God created spirits from abundant light and then cast the veil of the light of His countenance over them. If He had not concealed this light with the light of His own countenance, then all the angels, catching sight of them, would prostrate themselves before them." This is not astonishing for "when We refined him We breathed Our spirit into him." In a similar vein is the saying: "He created man in His own image."

Khwaja Abu Sa'id Abul Khair³⁰³ gives a hint about this. He says:

O foolish ones, the Holy Soul is hidden from all:
No one has seen His face, and who has heard His name?
Whoever sees His beauty in this world is astonished:
O foolish ones, the Law has said: "We are cut off."

Ain ul-Quzat says: "Say, the spirit comes from a command of my Lord." This is a complete explanation, but he says about the mystics: "One beloved of God said: 'Giving orders and following them out refer to things and creatures but, above all, it is the spirit that gives commands. It gives but does not accept orders; itself acts, but is not acted upon; subdues, but is not subdued.'" Nothing more can be said than this. If the Law were not to curb expressions of madness you would ask what the spirit is. The divine jealousy, however, cannot be overlooked, as "God is undoubtedly jealous." On account of this jealousy it has been forbidden to try to explain the spirit.

Khwaja Abu Sa'id says: "O brother, when you have attained 'I was a hidden treasure' the sequel will be 'the one who knows himself knows his

Lord." For men of perception the work is not hidden. It is not possible to write more than this. It was necessary to abridge it to this extent.

No one knows the full story. Hold your tongue, hold your tongue!

My dear friend, may God help you attain these realities! Here it is necessary to be very wary, for a person cannot traverse this wilderness by means of knowledge. One dear to God, under the guidance of his reason, cannot discover this secret, for there are many places where knowledge and reason become highway robbers. This is seen and witnessed among the philosophers and the seventy-two sects³⁰⁴, as a learned man has said:

Much knowledge means tumult and commotion:
 A keen mind can either be an escort or a robber.
 Enter an idol-temple and remain silent:
 For there one finds a silent idol and a Brahmin.

Do you understand what this means? Knowledge is the major-domo standing at the threshold, quietly observing and overseeing the King's attendants, but having no access to His secrets. Even though the intellect is an accurate balance, nevertheless a mountain cannot be weighed on a balance which is used for weighing gold and silver.

The higher states and realities related to union with God, such as mystical knowledge; the essence, qualities and sayings of the Lord - may He be glorified and exalted - are not meant for everyone, but would be a great boon to a servant. It would be unlawful, however, for anyone to plunge therein out of time.

Someone said to the Chosen One: "O Apostle of God, instruct me in esoteric knowledge!" He replied: "It prepares a person for death. Go, this work is not meant for you!" Knowledge of the secrets of the Day of Resurrection; the knowledge of spirits; the secrets of the divine decree and whatever else is related to the reality of religion should not be discussed by way of detailed analysis. This would be unlawful, but not if it is done in summary form. Thus it is that some members of this group provide me with subtle hints and write things which admonish, excite and stimulate me. Such people are genuinely holy. A dervish should know this so that he may not fall into error in what he says or hears. "O the One no one knows except he who knows himself! O God, I repent and ask pardon for whatever is false and deceitful, and for whatever I have said or done which is not pleasing to You! 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Apostle of God.'" It is related that a holy man said:

When I seek His world I find myself:
Now I shall seek myself and find Him.

Also

Send as much pain as You can,
But send Your help for my heart as well!
How can I bear the pain without Your help?
For few are able to bear this type of pain!

Letter 74

THE PERFECTION OF LOVE AND THE HEIGHTS OF STEADFASTNESS

When the lamp of love for You was lit,
The moth of my selfish soul was consumed therein.
Smash the cage of your existence! Go ahead, don't be afraid!
The bird which was terrified has become tame.

Realize, O brother, that love of the Lord - may He be glorified and exalted - is the very last of all the stages. It is better than all the steps leading up to it. Once you have attained the stage of love there is no further stage left, except for those things which pertain to love, such as yearning, intimacy, striving to please and such-like things. There is no higher level once you have attained the stage of love, as, for example, repentance, asceticism or similar such things.

It is related that Khwaja Sari Saqati said: "On the Day of Resurrection each community will be addressed in relation to its own messenger: 'O community of Moses!' 'O community of Jesus!' and 'O community of Muhammad!' whereas those who love the Lord - may He be glorified and exalted - will be addressed in this fashion: 'O saints of God!'" Whatever the members of this group do in the present age is done purely for the love of God. They are undisturbed either by the hope of paradise or the fear of hell, for they are outstanding in steadfastness. They are ready to settle for nothing less than God. This is because they have come under the sway of "Be submissive!"

They are not concerned about heaven or hell:
These people are distinctive in this way.

Whoever is veiled from the Friend feels sorely tried, even if he has the key to the king's treasures in his possession. Whoever is attracted by the grace of the Friend has received the most handsome of gifts, even if he has no bread to eat of an evening.

O brother, devotion or worship in the hope of paradise or out of fear of hell, if examined, is really completely geared to one's own enjoyment, not "purely for the sake of God, or to honour Him, or out of love for Him." The members of this group hold that, if God Most Exalted were to pitch the tent of union and the dome of nearness in hell, they would make the fire of hell a lotion for their eyes. Yet, if they were to lose sight of Him for a moment in highest heaven, they would make such an outcry that those in hell would take pity on them.

In the Torah one finds: "Who is more benighted than the person who worships Me for the sake of paradise or out of fear of hell? If I had not created paradise or hell, would it mean I was not worthy of worship? Not at all!"

It is related that Jesus, during his journeys, arrived among a certain people. He inquired of some of them about the purpose of the worship they were engaged in. They replied: "We are afraid of hell and hope to go to paradise." He replied: "You are afraid of a creature and also place your hope in a creature." He reached another people. He again inquired about the purpose of their worship. They replied: "To love and glorify God." He said to them: "You really are God's friends! It behoves me to stay with you."

If you acquire but an inkling of friendship
 A Sun has begun to shine within your heart.
 Anyone whose heart has come alive with love
 Has become intimately bound to God.

Here one point needs to be noted, namely, that no believer is bereft of traces of love for the simple reason that he is not lacking in the beginnings of mystical knowledge and faith. Moreover the strength of affectionate love becomes so overpowering that this love becomes a veritable passion enabling the person to turn his gaze from himself and emerge from the grip of habit. This is called "passionate love³⁰⁵." Most people are far from it.

Love and arranging belong to the King:
 Don't look for secrets from the guards.
 Love's sacrifice is a pure spirit:
 Don't seek love fruitlessly here and there.
 Love is king over all creation:
 Don't seek nearness to Him from this or that.

Holy people have said that the perfection of love consists in loving the Lord with your whole heart to such an extent that you don't turn your attention to anyone else, nor do you leave room in your heart for anyone else. This

is known as 'absorption.' When love reaches this state He becomes the beloved of your heart, the adored one of your heart, the desired one of your heart, and the one who preoccupies your heart. You will exclaim:

No matter what I see I think of You:
Glory be to God! You are the pupil of my eye.

"I am Laila and Laila is me" refers to this. Men of perception are convinced that "love bears a servant to God." In this sense love is obligatory for the Way.

A hapless ant desired to reach the Ka'ba:
He caught hold of the feet of a pigeon and lo! He was there.

That pigeon is love. Sheikh Abdullah Ansari says: "He sent 120,000 jewels of prophethood to the people. The alienated did not perceive the least sign of friendship. Alas! If only an inkling of the Lord's love had been sent, all would have become His friends."

Your level of steadfastness reaches the world of holiness:
How could Gabriel have moved about there?
You can reach your noble Object without means
When Love itself acts as your escort.

One loved by God said: "A hundred and twenty-four thousand messengers did not make the slightest advance beyond that tradition. On the feast day of our lord, Muhammad, the Apostle of God, it became clear that what had been a drop had become for us an ocean."

In Beauty's bazaar all virtues are flawed:
Each buyer simply has to pass by You.

Moreover the origin of this work is grief. "The Apostle of God was beset with sorrows and perpetually submerged in cares."

I breathe in and imbibe all Your grief
So that, after me, naught of Your grief is left for others.

It is said that when, on the Day of Resurrection, the lovers of God will rise from their tombs, they will look to see if they have left behind even a trace of grief. If so, they will lament so pitifully that the inhabitants of hell will feel pity for them. Thus it has been said:

If you are subject to pain and are a man of the Way,
Desire pain, desire pain and keep on desiring it!
Otherwise this pain will quickly take hold of you
Saying, this pain of yours has no profit.
If this pain catches hold of you
Then it will afflict you for all eternity.

Letter 75**THE WRATH OF THE BELOVED AND BEING ABLE TO DO WITHOUT THINGS YOU WANT**

Sa'di, you cannot turn love aside because of cruelty:
 "I'll sit at the door if ejected from the house."

In the world of love, cruelty and loyalty, prohibition and permission are all one and the same.

I am your slave, whether You accept me or reject me:
 In fidelity's lane being honoured or reviled means the same.

"Love does not increase with fidelity, nor does it decrease with cruelty."

Whether it be by attraction, blows or the gallows,
 The way to work with You has become clear to me.

As long as a distinction is drawn between cruelty and fidelity, between prohibiting and allowing, your passionate love is immature and your affective love is incomplete. You are seeking something for yourself, not for the Beloved.

He whispers: "Listen to my secret if you have a heart!"
 The sword of cruelty is drawn like a touchstone.
 Whoever seeks pleasure in both worlds
 Will never be worthy of My love.

O brother, affectionate love is king. It does not accept any partnership. Passionate love is jealous. It does not accept a rival. "I am Laila and Laila is me." To seek oneself and to seek one's Friend would be associationism. In oneness, however, there is no room for association with any other. "Either you exist, or I do." You must have heard:

A shout arose: "Two masters rule the land!"

God Most Exalted gave the prophet David a correct and accurate revelation: "I have made it unlawful for hearts to love Me and also love another."

Your house is filled either with goods, or with the remembrance of your Friend.

Whoever seeks what he himself wants is caught up with self, and anyone who is preoccupied with self is a lover of self, not a lover of God.

In both abodes self-effacement should be such that
 The foot is hidden from the head, and the head from the foot.
 Since you play with head and foot along this Way,
 You have recognized the worth of being unconcerned with self.

Imam Shibli said: "If I am given a choice between paradise and hell, I shall accept hell, for paradise is what my selfish soul desires, but hell is what my Friend wants."

If those in hell are bound by His locks,
 In all five prayers I myself would pray for hell.

O brother, the path of passionate lovers is an amazing one, while the work of affectionate lovers is fraught with terror and hardship. The unmanly are not capable of hearing about it, while hermaphrodites are incapable of bearing it.

Not everyone can be the confidant of Wealth:
 Not every ass can bear the Messiah's weight.

You need to be a Majnun to bear the accusations cast your way; you need to be a Farhad to pierce a mountain without a beam; and you need to be a Zulaikha in order to bear the name of Joseph.

Go out and play, for you are not meant to be a lover!

"All those things for which a man was created come easily to him: fighting for one, and an abundance of food for another." There are many useless things in the world and innumerable prattling tongues, but there is also knowledge in the insights of men of perception.

We know what brocade is and how long it is:
 We can distinguish genuine love from what is feigned.

Men of perception see and grasp everything. In addition they consider everything as excusable, for nothing happens except what is meant to be, and nothing is received except what has been allotted. What can anyone do? "The ink of what is written has already dried." O brother, act like a man and live like a man!

Whoever walks this Path will have to fight the famous Rustam.

For a lover, an ocean is a ford and a mountain is a piece of straw. Fidelity and cruelty are the same, so are forbidding and allowing. This is the sign of righteousness.

Either keep Me in mind, or remain far from Me:
 I have befriended you, but you don't care for Me.

Letter 76**THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF THE LORD OF HONOUR AND HOW DISTANT INTELLECT IS FROM BEING A CAUSE**

Prayerful greetings from this inconsequential one, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known by the title of Sharaf! O brother, no matter what your state or activity, don't break your heart or be without hope, for the Lord is unswayed by the devotion of the devout and remains holy in spite of the transgressions of sinners. He does whatever He wants. He is not dependent on causes. Thus holy men have said: "The favoured person is the one upon whom God freely bestows His grace, not on account of what he does or what he is." The reason for this is that, if grace depended on actions, then the communities preceding this one would have been more favoured, for they are seven or eight hundred years older. Their works and deeds would have undoubtedly been greater. The age of this community is probably sixty or seventy years³⁰⁶. Inevitably it has fewer works to its credit. Even so, this community has been more favoured than all the others. Likewise, if grace depended on one's nature then Satan would have been more favoured than Adam, for Satan was made from bright fire, while Adam was fashioned from dark clay. Nevertheless Adam was more favoured than Satan. We thus know that grace does not depend on actions or nature. In other words, it is not a person's actions or nature but the grace of God which is the cause. If someone is raised to the heights of heaven, it happens apart from any action or work; and if anyone is dragged down to the depths of hell, it happens apart from any offence or sin. Muhammad, the Apostle of God, was lifted to the heights of heaven quite apart from any action or work of devotion on his part, even before he came into existence. Abu Jahl was banished to the depths of hell quite apart from any offence or crime on his part, even before he came into existence. Umar was accepted by God while in an idol-temple, while Abi ibn Sulul, a hypocrite living in a mosque, was rejected.

O Abode of souls, all are astonished at You!
 A hundred thousand intellects have been confused by You.
 O You who lie hidden from the gaze of eye and soul,
 Intellect and understanding are lost in Your work.

"He is the Absolute Monarch having unlimited power."

Those who are acquainted with the human heart
 Restraining their hearts from inquiring 'why' or 'wherefore.'

Who is the person so bold who, out of fear of You,
Could open his mouth except in homage to You?

In short, it has been explained that, no matter how many deeds and actions he may have done, a humble person keeps his gaze on His grace. What work or devotion could Pharaoh's magicians boast of, and what worship or struggle with self could the Companions of the Cave lay claim to, since, in no time at all, they were changed from strangers to friends. They were raised from the depths of hell to the heights of heaven and displayed to the whole world in order to vindicate the saying: "My work does not depend on causes. I do whatever I want. There is no room for any cause."

At times You lead forth a friend from an idol-temple:
At times You turn a stranger into a friend.
At times from a house producing veritable jewels³⁰⁷
You produce an Abu Talib, given over to stones.

O brother, intellect's writ does not run here, for the intellect is the instrument of analogy, but the Godhead cannot be comprehended by analogy. Knowledge of the Godhead depends on the will of God, not on the analogy of those who serve. Don't you see that this work is not achieved by intellectuals but by those who remain needy and indigent in this matter? God Most Exalted creates so many thousand species of creatures, yet He is in no way dependent on them or in need of them.

Nobody makes friends unless it is to his advantage, or needlessly provokes enmity. This is common sense. The Lord, however, derives no benefit from anyone, yet He loves everyone. Similarly, He cannot be harmed by anyone, even if He is at enmity with someone. Intellect teaches us to attract and cultivate friends and to cause trouble for our enemies and make them squirm. God Most Exalted, however, reserves inflictions for His friends and bestows upon His enemies whatever they desire. It is clear that analogy is inadequate in this context. This being so, intellect has no truck with Godhead.

O brother, Gabriel and Michael are ignorant of what He is about, so what access to Him could helpless intellect expect? Or how could man attain Him by thinking and reasoning?

When confronted with work of this nature,
Knowledge is bankrupt and intellect a beggar.

O brother, intellect is an instrument of service. It is not possible to serve God correctly without it. Nevertheless discovering the secrets of Lordship is not the task of helpless intellect. At this stage the intelligent and wise people of this world shake their heads in perplexity, while the learned and insightful are merely learning the alphabet, as far as this Lord is concerned.

What sort of Threshold is this having a lock without a key,
And what sort of Sea is this with a fathomless depth?
Even though they seek the way thereto in all directions,
O wonder! They cannot advance even a hair's breadth thereto.

The final point of the work is that the deeds and actions of servants are today signs of what was formerly determined for them concerning felicity or misery. Moreover, as it is not the reason, neither is it the cause, because a cause would precede the effect, but the deeds and actions of servants take place today, while the command concerning felicity or misery is from eternity. How can something today be the cause of something from eternity? By speaking in similes and metaphors, however, the heart is strengthened, no matter how weak it is, or inadequate and bankrupt of devotion, because the work depends on grace. This is where you should fix your attention! As far as possible you should exert yourself might and main.

If you are not acting thus along this Way,
 Exert yourself mightily: don't suffer loss!
 Even if the wealth of knowledge is uncaused,
 Devotion to God is the task of a man of wealth.

You should not dismiss yourself as of no significance or of no account. That would not be correct.

It is not only devotion that can be purchased there:
 Helplessness and weakness are also available at any hour.

Letter 77

THE SECRET OF MAN AND THE IGNORANCE THEREOF

O brother, unfortunately the lock of human nature is on hearts, while the chain of heedlessness binds thoughts. The world is heedless of its reality and remains veiled. When at death's door the lock is opened by the key of "We shall remove your veil from your eyes" and the chain of heedlessness is loosed from the restriction of "on that day you will stare petrified," a thousand cries arise from souls. This has been hinted at in the following:

Alas we have played with body and soul!
 We have not recognized the value of the soul.
 We journey along thirstily in every storm,
 Yet water flows abundantly from the Living Fountain.

O brother, it is known that when a whole world of pure and holy angels prostrated before dust, that dust was a vicegerent.

Until Adam's soul was made manifest,
 The Way to God Omnipotent was not known.
 The Way appeared when Adam did:
 In him appeared the key to both worlds.

Glory be to God, what a secret lies within this dust! The pen cannot write about it, nor can the tongue describe it, nor can the intellect encompass it, nor can knowledge comprehend it. "Man is My secret." If you think you understand, it means that every way is closed for you! Listen to this couplet:

The world is turned towards my beautiful countenance:
The Lord of the world is in my frail heart.

This is no place for hermaphrodites! In their view this smacks of incarnation.³⁰⁸
The religion of men is really one thing, and that of hermaphrodites is quite
something else. Say in reply:

O hermaphrodite, nature carries no weight here:
Loving God is no task for hermaphrodites.
How can the story of those madly in love be freely told?
What can be said of all boldness and personal effort?

"Love is a divine madness." Rationalists belong to one group, lovers to
another.

For rationalists, the Law is burdensome:
For those bereft of hearts, love is ennobling.
For the person who is led by love,
Unbelief and religion are both curtains at His door.

By means of the knowledge you possess, the prayers you perform and the
fasts you observe, you cannot advance along this Way!

All that knowledge is like a shrivelled-up body:
Knowledge about travelling the Way to God is something else.
The path of religion is not a trade or explanation:
Apart from desolation, nothing else is found therein.

O brother, that work involves pain. Until anyone's breast has embraced this
pain and confronted death, he cannot traverse this Way, nor can he endure the
trials of this Way.

A little of God's pain within your heart
Is better than acquiring both worlds for yourself.
Whoever does not experience this pain is not a man:
There is no remedy for you if it is unknown to you.

O brother, this Way is for adults. It is not child's play. You have to play with
position and wealth, wife and children, soul and body. This is the first step along
this Way.

Burn and pillage everything that is not God:
Apart from religion, purify everything through Him.
Pass beyond body, position, intellect and soul:
Along His way hold your heart in your hand.

Ain ul-Quzat says: "One hundred and twenty four thousand outstanding
examples of prophecy came into the world. Those who were estranged did not
experience friendship. If even a particle of the love of the Lord Himself had been
sent, all would have experienced His friendship."

The pain of love came, balm for every heart:
No difficulty was ever solved without love.
Whoever has been caught up in the secret of love

Will live forever as His intimate friend.

Letter 78

DISAVOWING THE WORLD AND AFFIRMING INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

**Withdraw from this headship, O worldly one!
Prepare provisions thereby for the world to come.**

O brother, poverty has many benefits and many different types of advantages, while wealth has many kinds of drawbacks and many kinds of grief. Nevertheless the love of rank and possessions has made the people of today blind and deaf. They consider all the drawbacks of wealth as a benefit and account all the benefits of poverty as a drawback, as was the understanding of Nimrod and Pharaoh, who laid claim to divinity.

**A hundred worlds of knowledge, together with its meaning,
Bring the burden of hell, together with the world.
Unless you have expelled the world from your heart,
There is no place for you except the flames of hell.**

Thus it is said that the sign of someone who has sensed God is to reject the world and shun the company of worldly people.

**The world is the enemy of God in actual fact:
How can God's enemy become His friend again?**

Wherever there is rejection of the world it becomes clear to us that the intimate knowledge of God is present; and wherever there is no rejection of the world we know that there is no intimate knowledge of God. This is because both rejection and intimate knowledge are found in essence in the profession of faith,³⁰⁹ for this is a mount composed of negation and affirmation. Negation here means rejecting the world and affirmation means intimate knowledge of the Lord. In short, whoever disavows the world has renounced everything, while whoever has acquired intimate knowledge of God has made the complete affirmation. This is what is meant by saying "There is no god but God," not that someone simply utters the words, "There is no god but God," yet prostrates before the world, turning towards nobles and kings in order to do so. This is called "faith on the tongue, but unbelief in the heart."

**With a Quran in the hand, yet unbelief in the heart,
A drunken laggard sleeps like a hypocrite on a couch.**

Also:

O heart, become a Muslim! Cast off your sacred thread!

Thus it is known that most people today simply claim to have intimate knowledge of God. The world has led them from the Path, yet they are not even aware of it, just as it led astray both Nimrod and Pharaoh.

A hundred worlds of knowledge, together with its meaning,

Bring the burden of hell, together with the world.
 Unless you have expelled the world from your heart
 There is no place for you except the flames of hell.³¹⁰

At this stage reflect for a moment lest you be deceived. What is intended here by rejection is the rejection of what is superfluous, not of what is necessary and needful. The reason for this is that, just as the quest of what is superfluous is not pleasing to God and is a veil along the Path, so too rejecting what is needful and necessary is also displeasing to God and an obstacle along the Path. This is because people daily need food, clothing and a place to stay. If a person completely rejects everything, he has to depend on others and falls into covetousness. Both of these are calamities and will destroy him. Since the quest of what is superfluous results in great corruption so too does the rejection of what is needful and necessary result in great corruption. Here someone may refer to how Abu Bakr Siddiq abandoned everything so that, when the Messenger inquired about what he had set aside for his wife and children, he replied: "God and His Apostle." The answer to this difficulty is this: "If your spiritual state and activity are like Abu Bakr Siddiq's state and activity, you also will become secure." What can a vegetable-seller expect? The comparison should be made with a king.

O brother, without the companionship of mystics and without looking after the footwear of the men of the Path, no one can do this work correctly on account of his excesses and ignorance. The author of the following has spoken correctly:

How can a blind man possibly walk in a straight line?
 It would be wrong for him to walk without a staff.
 The Way is long and full of calamities, O son:
 One who walks this Way is in need of a guide.

You should enter the company of good, learned men and shun that of evil and foolish ones. All this asceticism and struggle with self which is found among the Sufis is to enable disciples to become worthy of the companionship of the learned. Every worthy disciple who associates with learned men for a day, or even for an hour, would be better off on this account than if he underwent a hundred years of asceticism and struggle with self but without the company of the learned. Finally you must have heard:

The dog of the Companions of the Cave for some days
 Nudged the feet of pious men - and became a man!

Don't you see that most of the companions of the Messenger had passed many years worshipping idols in a temple. They were unexpectedly granted a few days in the enriching company of the king of prophets. As a result each one of them became a Muslim worthy of imitation, resplendent like the sun and moon, each a king, and this royal approval was obtained: "My companions are like stars providing you with good example and guidance."

Inevitably they became outstanding in service:
 They became the best men in the world.
 Since they have been liberated from hell,

They enter joyously the heavenly Eden.

O brother, whatever is acquired is the fruit of association, yet it has been rightly said:

The companionship of good men has vanished from the world:
A cloth covered with honey has become a hornets' nest.

Today we should throw dust on our heads and grieve over our faults. We should say the very thing Khusrau said:

In the assembly of union with You the intoxicated imbibe oceans:
When Khusrau's turn comes, no wine remains in the cup.

Letter 79

SHOWING SEVERITY TOWARDS FRIENDS AND KINDNESS TOWARDS ENEMIES

At times You lead forth a friend from an idol-temple:

At times You turn a stranger into a friend.

At times from a house producing veritable jewels

You produce an Abu Talib, given over to stones.

O brother, today God's enemies are distinguished by blessings and ease, while His lovers are distinguished by calamities and effort, as Imam Shibli has said: "Today the Lord deals with His friends in the manner He will deal with His enemies after Judgement Day."

O friend, We have not given Pharaoh even a headache
Because he has not a head which could bear My pains.

Intellect is powerless to give orders here. What it says or listens to counts for nothing here, for it is utilized for analogical thinking. The Godhead, however, is not correctly perceived by analogy. This depends on God's good pleasure. In other words, He does whatever He wants. It does not depend on analogical thinking. Don't you see that no intelligent person does anything without experiencing therein his own poverty and need? God Most Exalted has created 18,000 worlds without experiencing, at any time or for any reason, any resultant need or necessity. Also nobody cultivates friendship without benefiting from it, or remains unscathed by enmity. This is what reason teaches. The Lord, however, gains nothing from anybody, yet loves people; nor does anyone harm Him, yet there is enmity towards them.

What sort of Threshold is this, having a lock without a key?
And what sort of Ocean is this, with depths unfathomable?
No heart can find its way straight to His essence:
Soul and intellect are ignorant of His perfection.

O brother, no matter how accurate a balance the human intellect may be, nevertheless a banker's balance cannot be used to weigh a mountain. Glory be

to God, neither Gabriel nor Michael knew the secret of what He was doing. What could helpless human intellect, knowledge or understanding attain to?

Heart and intellect are astonished by His glory:
 Body and soul are dazzled by His perfection.
 If you were to enter this Ocean for a moment,
 Your astonishment of soul would engulf the world.

Finally, consider the story of the messenger Joseph. While still a mere lad and sinless he was thrown into a well by his brothers. The old father of the messenger was sorely distressed at this separation, not merited by any offence. He was then lifted out of the well and sold into slavery. Then Zulaikha sent him on his way. He was then taken away and ended up as a servant of the king, while his brothers, after that sin of theirs, ended up in the exalted position of having the crown of prophethood placed on their heads. How can this be fully comprehended?

This type of work which we see before us
 Comes from the knowledge of the needy and the mind of the poor.
 We have been drowned in an ocean of astonishment:
 From head to foot utterly forlorn have we come.

Take note that, on the night of ascent, 124,000 messengers cried out, "Give way! Give way!" for Buraq, the incomparable mount of the king of prophets and the crown of Sufis. Similarly earth's treasures were placed before him and he was told: "Do whatever you like! For you there is no account or rebuke in this. As far as We are concerned there is no harm in whatever belongs to you." Or consider the time when, for the sake of a few measures of barley he was taken to the door of a Jew and said: "Give me a loan!" That Jew thrust an arrow into his liver by saying: "You have no camel or sheep. How will you repay it?" The secret is expressed thus:

I have plenty, or I experience poverty:
 My heart exults, or it is cast down.
 I'm behind all creatures, or out in front:
 I myself am the chameleon of the age.

Once this has been understood you must immediately desist from criticism and embrace the Will of God. If it is a blessing, well and good; if it requires an effort, well and good; if it is good health, well and good; and if it is sickness, well and good. In this way you will become aware of the extent of your servitude.

What will a slave do who does not obey commands?
 What will a ball do which does not present itself to be struck?

Nothing happens except what has been determined. There is no point in getting too upset. O brother, whenever a scribe writes the letter *qaf* on a piece of paper it doesn't turn out as *kaf*. Similarly, when he writes *kaf* it certainly doesn't become *qaf*.

Whatever the teacher writes on the board

Can be read by a primary-school child.

When those endowed with insight and mystical knowledge ponder over this they gird up their loins for, having created an Abu Jahl from all eternity, it is impossible for him to turn out as Abu Bakr Siddiq. What can the intellect make of this?

Confronted with His majesty lovers are quite overcome:
 Where is their intellect, and of what use is their soul?
 What impact does faith or unbelief have on His self-sufficiency?
 How could doubt or certainty affect His infinite silence?

One cannot write more than this, for it pertains to what God decrees and ordains. Here the command is: "Remain silent when the divine decree is mentioned!"

Letter 80

SAYING WHAT SHOULD BE SAID AND REFRAINING FROM SAYING WHAT SHOULDN'T

When intimate secrets are revealed to you during this work,
 Keep concealed the secret which is hidden.
 Keep your heart free from lust and your tongue from chatter:
 Realize that your happiness lies in effacement of self.

O brother, the Apostle gave the following command to the religious scholars of the community: "Speak to the community about what they can understand. Don't talk about things beyond their capacity. Do you want to make them reject God and His Apostle?" The effect of the fear and dread of this injunction on the souls of men of learning and mystical insight is like that of hell upon the souls of God's enemies in the life to come. It is not fitting for religious scholars to speak about everything they know. There are many things which they know and yet should not mention. "Speak to people according to their capacity to understand" keeps a check on them. If they were to talk about everything they know there would be more mischief than guidance and the damage would outweigh the benefit.

If it were proper to talk about everything then the Sufi sheikhs would not have given hints in their writings, nor would they have employed technical terms in their explanations. They did all these things so that they could say what was fitting to mention, while things that should not be said could remain hidden from view, for they were known to them. If it were proper to say everything then there would not be any letters used as abbreviations in the Qur'an. In this way some religious scholars say of letters used as abbreviations: "This is a secret between God and His beloved."³¹¹

In *Qut ul-Qulub* Imam Abu Talib Makki³¹² has said: "There are three kinds of knowledge: exoteric, esoteric and that which exists between God and His servant."

Exoteric knowledge should be shared with external-minded people and esoteric with the interior-minded. That knowledge which exists between the Lord and His servant, however, should not be shared by the servant either with exoteric or esoteric-minded people, for "revealing the secret of lordship is disbelief" appears to him. "Killing anyone who speaks openly of the divine oneness is better than allowing others to live." This would be prompt payment for him, for this meaning has been specified with regard to some.

You have seen how, intoxicated with love,
Hallaj revealed a hint, and went to the gallows.
Hold your tongue, for His lovers,
Being in love, have no time for talk.

O brother, the last thing to be said is that "the seeker talks, while the one who has found is silent." This is the origin of the saying that the distinctive virtue of mystics is that they are "deaf, dumb and blind." The king of mystics³¹³ - the mercy of God be upon him - saw something secret and fell down. In that state he wrote: "Deaf, dumb and blind indicates the secret of the mystics."

He paid no attention to knowledge, so we kept quiet:
Intellect did not impress Him, so we ended up mad.

In such a situation, how could one speak? If it were right to speak then why say "we kept quiet" and "we ended up mad?" They would have to speak night and day, using a hundred contrived interpretations and giving a hundred kinds of description. Inevitably a whole ocean would gush forth and they would have no time to catch their breath.

Men imbibe a thousand oceans yet walk away thirsty:
What made you drunk since you have not tasted a drop?
Do you know why the pure ones keep quiet?
In their innermost hearts they are utterly self-effacing.
Everyone drinks wine offered by the Friend:
They play with their lives, yet conceal the divine secret.

Moreover, whenever it is reported that members of this group have said something that would have occurred when they were overcome by some spiritual state and were inebriated then, as far as they themselves were concerned, they were helpless: "Lovers are not caught for their offences." Whatever proceeds from a lover is from the world of compulsion, not from the world of choice.

How can the story of madmen be one of freedom?
How can it be all freedom and striking deals?
The work of a lover is one of compulsion:
And that results from an excess of friendship.
What a person who has lost his heart speaks out freely
Can never be uttered by one as yet self-possessed.
For rational-minded people the Law is a constraint:
Love presents itself to those who have lost their hearts.

In short, this description has been such as has revealed nothing from speaking or listening. Young children remember the words of their elders and repeat them yet, because they have not had any experience of the matters discussed by their elders, they derive no profit from them, nor do they experience any longing. This has been hinted at thus:

Come inside an idol-temple and be seated:
Wrap your robe, thread like, upon the idol.

Wise people seek the experience itself, not descriptions of it. By making an effort the work gets done, not by talking.

Get involved! Prefer doing to talking!
Along this Way effort results in experience.

Inquire about how to travel along this Way, not talk about it! You should desist from speaking about it and continue seeking a remedy for your ills. You should grieve over your wrongs while you still have time, otherwise it will be difficult to move out of the world into this state and advance towards this enterprise. There is no further place for grieving and seeking a remedy other than this present one.

How can we prepare a salve for this pain?
When life is over, where else can we grieve?
If everything adds up to One, the work has been accomplished:
Otherwise without a doubt much grief will be your lot.

I apply all these calamities and reproaches to myself, not to anyone else. I myself experience all this grief and difficulty along this Way. I don't propose this warning and counsel as intended for someone else. I myself need a thousand people to warn and counsel me, as well as to sympathize with me and experience my grief. Whoever is himself similarly caught up will also experience distress and lamentation. If his work is prestigious he should abandon it and become involved in something which is not. This would not be an act of madness, for this unfortunate one is caught up in such a situation. If he accepts grace and mercy, together with so much oppression, and generously allows this eclipse of his plans, there would be hope for his salvation. Otherwise, what is the difference between an Abu Jahl or a Pharaoh and this unfortunate one? This is the place to cry and lament. Blessings upon Khwaja Attar who said:

O Lord, buy me back from my hands and tongue:
Extend Your hand and buy me back from the world.
I am intoxicated and senseless: make me aware!
I am asleep and out of my senses: wake me up!
O Creator, if I have become a child of habit,
At last for once I have born witness to my faith.
And if I have given the age to the wind of ignorance,
Through Your pardon accept me and call me on.
If no one else wants to excuse me,
Through Your pardon excuse my sin.

If a gentle breeze comes from You,
I would rush to offer my life in Your alley.

This has been sent to you for your close study, O brother. It is not as though it has been written particularly for you. You should not form a different opinion. It should not be surprising that by studying the story of the distressed those who are themselves in pain derive profit from doing so. People of discrimination can even draw profit from the way a non-believer behaves. If a distressed person learns something from the way a believer acts, why should that be astonishing?

As for the tree of eternal life for the soul,
One enters Islam by the path of unbelief.

If someone profits from tales of distress or astonishment, there is no deceit in this, for there are many seekers of this kind.

Hold it for certain that the lions of the chase
Want the friendship of ants along the Way.

The messenger Solomon, even though he had the glory of prophethood and kingship, is said to have sat at the entrance to an ant-nest for forty days so that he might gain some insight into the secrets of the divinity from the intricacy of their organization. The story is well known.

Letter 81

THE GRACE OF THE SONS OF ADAM AND THE LOVE OF THE LORD OF THE WORLD

O brother, I have studied assiduously for many years the injunctions of the religious outlook of this group in the books in which their writings are found. The consensus of the sheikhs of the Path and the scholars of the Law comes to this. Whoever has arrived at a high stage, or is raised to an exalted position, or is adorned with learning and mystical knowledge, or has spiritual riches and power revealed to him, will either be destroyed in the wilderness of permissiveness, or will perish in the wilderness of incarnationism and of considering himself to be one, and thus have his faith destroyed, unless he himself resolutely follows the Law of the Messenger and refuses to draw back from it.³¹⁴

Whoever has not found a place on the way of Muhammad,
Will not profit from this threshold, even if he roams eternally.
Search for the wealth of that place, and seek its religion:
In that place seek the return of the convinced ones.

There are some foolish people who, acting on their idea of oneness, yet lacking a thoroughly experienced leader and a wise guide, trusted in their own puny intellects and, in their weakness, have been deluded by Satan's suggestions and have fallen in this fierce wilderness, having had their faith destroyed. Mercy be upon Khwaja Attar who said:

A guide along the Way comes like the philosophers' stone:

His breast is like a deep-green ocean.
 The Way is long and full of disasters, O son:
 One travelling this Way needs a guide.
 If you alight upon this Way without a guide,
 It would mean everything becomes a hill obstructing you.
 How can a blind man possibly walk straight?
 It would be wrong for a blind man to walk without a staff.
 If you experience pain, a guide will appear:
 A key will appear to fit the lock of your fear.

O brother, since "There is no god but God" is reality, and "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" is the Law, what would you say if a person spent a thousand years proclaiming "There is no god but God" yet did not add, "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" because he did not believe it? He had not become a Muslim at all, nor was his faith correct. If it were so, Jews and Christians would all be Muslims, for they say "There is no god but God,"³¹⁵ but do not add: "Muhammad is the Apostle of God." Since faith without affirming that "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" would not be faith,³¹⁶ in a similar way, without his Law there could be no religion of Islam. Hakim Sana'i says:

Since You are sick with sensuality
 Only "a Mercy to the worlds"³¹⁷ can cure you.
 He alone will be your guide: don't go seeking the Way!
 Let him alone be your tongue: don't go speaking foolishly!
 His Law is spirit, and his intellect spiritual.
 Your opinion is a friend of your selfish soul.
 Without clinging to the stirrup of the Chosen One,
 Your feet will not move at all towards Him.
 Become his dust - and exercise sovereignty:
 Become his, and do whatever you like.
 Whoever is not as dust at his door,
 Even if he be an angel, dust is on his head.

O brother, as long as knowledge and intellect remain, the Law and difficulties will also remain. Whoever rejects this would be beyond the pale of Islam, according to the consensus of the sheikhs and the unanimous opinion of the religious scholars. Nevertheless if a work greater than knowledge and intellect appears to someone and a state becomes manifest which is called "the mode of love," it is a gift, not something acquired.

Their pain is not acquired, it is bestowed:
 How could a pain, if acquired, be correct?
 Intellect and command are fit to be teased out:
 Love and faith are things to be experienced.

Thus people say that "Love is a divine insanity." What would apply to an intelligent man would not apply to a person madly in love. Don't expect impulsiveness from a prudent man, just as you should not expect caution from a person in the grip of love. Such a person would be excused. Undoubtedly a lover

does not possess a heart.³¹⁸ A body without a heart is not a speaker. This matter is clear in the commentary of Imam Zahid. This matter is also clear in other places. What transpires within a person in that world is known to him. From this state he gives such-like signs:

For intelligent people the Law comes as a burden:
Love visits those who have given away their hearts.
The pain of love has come as healing for every heart:
No difficulty has ever been solved without love.

Something is effected between the person and the Lord, whatever it may be. And whatever happens is a secret, no matter how contrary to the Law it may appear.

I share a secret with You, unknown to any other:
Even if I lose my head, I'll not share Your secret with another.

This has been dealt with in brief, but it is hoped that capable people, by means of their penetrating gaze, will obtain what they desire, God willing! "I seek refuge in God from what makes me defective and contemptible and I say: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Apostle.'" For any other person to enter upon this Way while lacking that pain and not having experienced that state and yet exaggeratedly claiming, "I am a lover," or "I am a Unitarian," would entail abandoning the religion of Islam. God protect us from such a fate! A hint about this was given thus:

Unbelief for the unbeliever, religion for the religious-minded:
Let Attar's heart taste but a trace of Your pain.
A trace of the divine pain in your heart
Is better for you than if you acquired both worlds.

Nowadays everyone has much to say about what love is like; what oneness is; and what it is like to experience ecstasy, but has no notion of what love really is; of what oneness is; or of what it is like to experience ecstasy. O brother, this enterprise is not an idle one, nor is it ten quires of paper which you read. This is another kind of knowledge and a different kind of group.

All this knowledge is a compendium of external matters:
The knowledge of traversing the Way to God is different.
How can the food given to those pure ones
Possibly be given to mere beginners?
How can a letter, which blackens a piece of paper,
Make a darkened heart shine like the moon?
The taste and knowledge of masters of the heart is different,
Being better than the knowledge of both worlds.
Everyone for whom that knowledge has meaning
Is himself tossed into an ocean of secrets.

Letter 82

ARE THE ACTIONS AND COMMANDS OF THE LORD MOST EXALTED INHERENTLY RELATED TO A CAUSE OR ARE THEY FREE FROM IT?

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Study this carefully and rest assured that what you wrote has reached me. The topic has become clear. You have inquired whether the actions and commands of the Lord Most Exalted are inherently related to a cause or whether they are not so related.

O brother, this question is connected with the science of theology. It pertains to that science as a basic question of theology and has been discussed by different theologians. There has been a long discussion about the actions of the Lord among theologians. Since their discussion is highly reliable the question has consequently been greatly illuminated. Nevertheless, since you have raised the matter in the form of a question which you want answered, it is necessary to write in brief what can be said on the topic. It has been said: "May God defend us from what is mean and contemptible by means of His mercy!"

Realize that the fundamental question discussed by the theologians is whether the actions and commands of the Lord are causally related to anything or not. Some say they are related to a cause like overseers of the affairs of servants. Some say that the actions and commands of the Lord are not related to any cause. Each person produces proofs and arguments to buttress his original contention. The intention of those who say that the actions and commands of the Lord are not related to anything is that the Godhead is dependent on the divine will, not on intellectual analogy. Whoever employs analogy says that the Lord's actions depend on the actions of His servants. What is detestable as far as creatures are concerned is also detestable for the Lord. What is good as far as creatures are concerned is also good as far as the Lord is concerned. He is compared to human beings, but the Lord Most Exalted is entitled to be called pure and holy, not to be used as a term of comparison. A person who holds this opinion says that the Lord does whatever He wants to through the command of His divinity. No one can ask Him why He did something which had an effect on someone, for His action either attracts towards what is profitable or averts what is harmful.³¹⁹ The action of the Lord is blameless with regard to both of these and is holy.

All those who say that the actions of the Lord and the commands of the Lord are related to a cause as overseers to the affairs of servants say so because if the actions of the Lord, Who is powerful, learned and wise were devoid of any purpose, they would be of no consequence. That would be impossible for the Lord! There should be some purpose connected with an action, but that purpose would be with reference to servants, not to the Lord. Action, for this reason, is not contrary to perfection.

Having said this the following question arises: As far as the Lord is concerned, what divine wisdom underlies the creation of the world? In other words, what is the purpose and meaning of doing so? The answer is given in this fashion. When we said that the action of the Lord Most Exalted had no purpose or meaning we meant that purpose and meaning referred to servants, not to the Lord. Thus it is said: "I was a Hidden Treasure longing to be known." This came so that servants might recognize Him. He knew that the aim and benefit reverted to the servants, not to Himself.

Finally, this discussion, covering several pages related to this matter, boils down to this. The Lord is powerful, learned and wise. He can either act or refrain from doing so. He chooses to act or not to act according to what would be the worthier of the two, because it would be a defect for someone who is powerful, learned and wise to abandon what is worthier without need or necessity, and that is impossible for Him. That worthiness would not be with reference to the Lord but would refer to servants, for it would be a command for the selfish soul. Action, for this reason, is not contrary to perfection. In fact, it is the height of perfection. The aim of recognition reverts to the servants, not to Him. One reason for the creation of unbelief and sin is said to be this - but God knows best!

Ain ul-Quzat has described in his *Zubdah* (The Best of Anything) that you might wonder why the Lord created everybody. Did He do so with the intention that they would return to Him? This is impossible. Did He do so without any intention? This is also impossible. Or was it simply because of His nature? Realize that this is a question that most religious scholars find perplexing. This is the reason why the messenger David was led to exclaim: "O Lord, why did You create everyone?" He replied: "I was a Hidden Treasure longing to be discovered." He could not imagine what the comprehension of that was like.³²⁰

For the mystics, however, after discussion, this much has been described. The creation of all existent beings is an attribute of Necessary Being as a necessity of existence. Just as eternity, for example, is an attribute, for Him, however, it is a necessity of existence. Since it could not happen that the essence of Necessary Being was not eternal, similarly it could not happen that the essence of Necessary Being was not creative. If it is asked why it is creative, then it could be asked why it is eternal. The answer would be that if it were not eternal then it would not be necessary. Moreover, if it was not creative, neither would it be necessary. Anyone who considers it correct that any existent being depends on Him for its existence has no option except to affirm that creation is an attribute but, for Him, is a necessity of existence, just as eternity is.

Letter 83

ABANDONING THE WORLD AND INCLINING TOWARDS THE LIFE TO COME

I inquired about the state of the world from a wise man:

He said: "It is a passing breeze, or a dream, or a fable."

"What about the state of a person who binds his heart thereto?"

He said: "He is a demon, a ghoul, or a madman."

O brother, paradise - which is created - cannot be found together with the world, so it would be impossible for the Creator of paradise to be found together with the world. It has been put thus:

If you espouse religion, don't woo the world!

Both of them cannot fit together: don't cheat!

Thus it is that "the abandonment of the world is the fountainhead of all worship." Since the world veils God from the people it has been disfigured by a curse: "The world and what it contains is accursed." One needs to be careful at this point since the goods of the world, in so far as they are needed, are not accursed, but only what is in excess of what is needed. When they are used in whatever is good and beautiful there is no curse attached.³²¹

The world is not bad if you work:

It becomes bad if you run after money.

If the world shows its face to anyone, however, then he passes his time in fulfilling the desires of his selfish soul and in living a life of ease and luxury. He is thus bound hand and foot. Such a one is accursed.

If your heart has been enlightened with genuine meaning,

Then your religion will entail abandoning the world.

O brother, it is the heart of a servant which is agreeable in the sight of the Lord Most Exalted, not his exterior. "God does not look at your faces, nor at your works, but at your hearts." If the exterior of a servant is stained by a preoccupation with the world then he should keep his heart, which is seen by God, unstained by love of the world, for love of the world is a defect in the eyes of the heart. When the heart is blinded the final states are completely hidden from a person. Thus it is that 124,000 messengers have all come and said: "The world is the fountainhead of all sin." Love of it is found in an evil heart. If there were no love of it in a person's heart, and the whole world were in his power and possession, still there would be no fear. Don't you see that the messenger Solomon was the monarch of all, yet remained unattached, since there was no love of the world in his blessed heart. You could say this was so because, together with all that, he was the leader of the ascetics.

If anyone has no hold over the world, yet his heart seeks the world and is enamoured of it, you would say that, by virtue of his seeking and loving the world, he is wholly taken up with it. Every heart which finds place for the love and quest of the world is unsound, being an unsound dwelling place. This should not be the case with you or me, so how could an unsound heart be fit for the Lord? This has been hinted at as follows:

What occurred to Adam on account of wheat

Befell the intellect on account of man's selfish soul.

O brother, the ugliness of the world has a limit, as a wise man said: "The world is Adam's toilet." When he ate that grain of wheat in paradise he had to fulfil a human need. It was said: "O Adam, paradise is not the place for that! You will have to go into the world and settle down there." Thus it is said that "the world is Adam's toilet." The Arabic word *kanif* means 'toilet.' Could any heart become enamoured of a toilet and take pleasure and enjoyment from it, or seek therein advantage or dignity?

You say, "Grief of soul is no more than a breath:
At each breath I have no fare except grief.
All the time my soul is stricken with wounds:
You know pain, but are yourself weak.

Ibn Abbas says that God Most Exalted has caused the world to be divided into three parts. One third is for believers; one third is for hypocrites; and one third is for unbelievers. Believers make use of their third provisions for their final end, as it has been said:

When you act like this, the world is good for you:
Befriend the world for the sake of your faith!

Hypocrites make use of their part to adorn and beautify themselves, while the unbelievers use the remaining portion for their own enjoyment. A believer should not make use of the world to the extent that he can, but only according to what is necessary. Wise and intelligent men say that the world is like a dream, so much so that one wise man has said: "My selfish soul is not in the world except as something for a man to trample upon." A person sees something while dreaming which makes him happy or something which makes him sad. It so happens that he then wakes up. Neither the happiness nor the sadness remains.

Whatever you see is no more than a phantom:
Whatever you know is nothing but deceit.

In this fashion men are asleep. When they die they will awake. Their hands will be empty of whatever made them happy or sad.

It is related that the tiny ant which conversed with the prophet Solomon said to him: "What has the Lord bestowed upon you?" He replied: "He has bestowed upon me the power to command the wind." The tiny ant said: "Do you know what that means? Of all that We have bestowed upon you nothing remains within your grasp except air."

It is related that the world has been assigned to Satan. When anyone reaches out to the world that accursed one says: "Do you know that I played with my faith and religion in order that the world might be assigned to me? Whoever reaches out to my domain of necessity gives his faith and religion to me." It is also said that, when the first gold and silver coins were struck, Satan picked them up and touched them to his forehead. He kissed both of them and said: "Whoever loves you is my slave."

If you want your faith to flourish, abandon the world:
Get rid of the latter in order to acquire the former.

Letter 84

SCATTERING IDOLS AND REMAINING UNCONTAMINATED BY THEM

My forehead is blackened from prostrating before idols:
I have certain suspicions about my Islamic faith.

O brother, the mystics have said that there are three common idols: love of the pleasures of the belly; love of the desires of the flesh; and love of wife and children. There are also three special idols: love of goods; love of position; and love of external adornment. The seventh idol is the infidel soul, which is the origin of all a person's idols. "The selfish soul is the greatest idol." Thus it is that the Law calls the struggle with one's selfish soul "the greatest struggle." "Let us turn from the lesser struggle to the greater one." An unbeliever can be driven off with a sword, and a demon can be driven effortlessly far from oneself, but the infidel soul is an internal enemy. No one can drive it far away, nor can anyone find respite from its evil.

A Brahmin's idol is in a temple, but I am worse than he:
For mine, face hidden, lies within my wayward heart.

One close to God has also said:

A thief inside the house: thus the selfish soul!
Beware of it, abode of heart and faith!
The thief who suddenly comes is a base one:
The thief within the house passes unnoticed.

I know that here the thought might occur that the prophets and saints had wives and children. Yes, this is true, but they were companions on the Way, single-minded in what they aimed at and sought, not strangers. Since it is known that idols can be common or special it should be known that, for us, idol-worship is hidden from us in its real meaning, whereas it is quite manifest as far as an unbeliever is concerned. The difference is no more than this. As our daily fare, according to the demands of our state, it would mean equivalently an idol-temple and a sacred thread, not a robe or turban. The justice of young men is referred to thus by one of them.

Secretly I was doing nothing more than worshipping an idol:
I was caught up with a sacred-thread: what can I hide from You?

O brother, whatever proves to be a veil for a servant with respect to God and makes him preoccupied with himself, not with that Exalted One, is considered to be an idol in the opinion of those who seek God. Say to whatever you seek: "Even if there is no question of a stone image, nevertheless it has the import of an idol and, for this reason, is called one." Thus we have the common lament:

I am an idol-worshipper, an idol-worshipper! I speak the truth about what I am.

When Khwaja Ja'far Sadiq³²² was asked what an idol was, he replied: "Anything you are more preoccupied with than with God is an idol for you." Another wise man has said: "The idol of each and everyone is his selfish soul."

Alas my whole life has been spent in pursuit of idols:
I remained, like an old Brahmin, in an idol-temple.

O brother, what do you want from your wicked, selfish soul, which is the chief of all idols? It has been heard that the selfish soul wants to rival the Lord in its claims and intends to be His equal. Don't you see that God Most Exalted insists from creatures that all salutations should be directed towards Him and that all praise is due to Him? The infidel soul seeks all salutations for itself and wants everyone to praise it. God Most Exalted has also insisted that people should all obey His commands and distance themselves from disobedience towards Him. The infidel soul wants everyone to carry out its commands and be loath to disobey them. God Most Exalted wants everybody to attribute everything freely and generously to Him. The infidel soul wants everybody to attribute everything to it liberally and generously. God Most Exalted wants everyone to make Him the object of their desire, and that all should be afraid of Him. The infidel soul wants everyone to make it the object of their desire, and wants everyone to be afraid of it. All these are attributes of the Lord – may He be glorified and exalted - which the infidel soul claims for itself. It wants everyone to attribute them to it. As long as this claim has an impact on men, God's claim inflames no desire.

Don't you see that the accused Pharaoh saw himself as somebody and considered that he also possessed these qualities himself? He exclaimed: "I am your supreme lord" (Q79:24). Don't presume that these defects were in him but not in you or me. These very defects are in all selfish souls and all of them make this very same claim. He had openly said, "I am your supreme lord" because he felt no fear, for in his age no one was greater than he. Our selfish souls, however, are timid. If we were to speak out openly as he did we would promptly be killed. What Pharaoh did openly our selfish souls do clandestinely. This is the difference. A man of insight said:

If you consider yourself a Muslim say to it but once:
"You can approach me if I bind your hands with a sacred thread."

O brother, faced with the deceit of the infidel soul nobody except God can escape. If you give credence for the twinkling of an eye to the claim of the infidel soul that it is a Muslim, you will be binding a hundred sacred threads about yourself and placing a hundred idols in front of yourself. The secret has been explained thus:

Because of this infidel placed within us,
Muslims have decreased in this world.

It is necessary to refrain at all costs from being friendly with one's infidel soul or from making peace with it. When it claims to be a Muslim and displays itself as all purity and rectitude, don't rely on it until you have put it to the test. Consider the messenger Solomon, with his sinlessness and crown of prophethood. A perceptive person said that, when Solomon's selfish soul made a claim to sanctity and displayed itself as wholly pure, he was suspicious about it and ignored

it until he could test it. Desiring sovereignty and a kingdom, without association, was for the sake of testing the selfish soul. Thus he said: "O Lord, bestow upon me a kingdom such that, after me, none may inherit," for the greatest desire of the selfish soul in this world is for sovereignty and a kingdom. When there is association with it one is treading a dangerous path. Out of suspicion of its desire he spoke in this fashion - "such that, after me, none may inherit" - so that, if there were some deceit or calamity hidden in the selfish soul, when its desire is fulfilled, what was hidden would become manifest. Moreover, since he was extremely special his selfish soul was undoubtedly all purity and sanctity. Nevertheless, since he was the head of those renowned for sovereignty and knew the wickedness, deceit and calamitous nature of the selfish soul as it really is, he did not consider it reliable until he had tested it, so that, when God Most Exalted bestowed upon him a kingdom, it was without association. Even though he had a kingdom without association, he lived as he had been doing beforehand, weaving baskets and selling them for two cakes of barley. One would be given to dervishes, while he would use the other to break his fast together with a poor man.

Since the fear of messengers concerning the wickedness of the selfish soul was like this, consider what the condition of others must be like! Thus it is that travellers along the Sufi Path and seekers of the kingdom of reality have had to suffer terrible things at the hands of the infidel soul and, on account of its deceit and wickedness, have washed their hands of their own selves and their own work. They have also borne themselves off to destruction. You have heard how some seekers even wore a sacred thread and entered an idol-temple. This was on account of their infidel souls.

O Brahmin, ten times you have destroyed my Islam!
One lost like me cannot even bow in front of an idol.

Also,

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

The following has also been heard:

Once again my guide exchanged a robe for a sacred thread:
He brought the wages of ninety years' labour and gave it to unbelievers.
Putting aside asceticism he embraced the life of a wanderer:
He gave everyone a bottle of wine, a robe and a turban.
He quickly changed his direction of prayer, and long remained engrossed:
He turned to the Beloved, giving himself again to Him in friendship.

All verses are in this same tenor. It is necessary to be careful at this stage, for this activity and this discussion is wholly concerned with what pertains to a mystical state, not with the demands of religious authority, nor with those of belief. Let us fly to God for protection! This point should be considered very attentively lest one be deceived. Legalistic scholars raise a tumult in this connection, for this morsel cannot be swallowed by them. A long time ago it was said: "The religion of the manly is one thing, while that of hermaphrodites is something else." What

can be done, since "God has created some to fight and others simply to eat and drink." In truth, it is not easy to be a Muslim!

If you are borne one day to this field,
You will read what attracts the manly.
A glance reveals thousands of meanings:
You will see, understand and firmly believe.

O brother, there is no need to be a sheikh, a disciple, a Sufi, an ascetic or a servant because today the world is full of them. It is extremely difficult, however, to be a Muslim. If one in a thousand were to be found then that would be much.

You are a Sufi, a sheikh dressed in green and a recluse of forty days:
You have become all these, but you haven't become a Muslim.

It is a declaration of the Law: "An age will come upon mankind when men will pray in mosques, but there will not be a single Muslim among them." But "that age" refers to the present age, as does "they pray in mosques," yet we are the ones who profess to be Muslims but, by our work and activity, we are unbelievers. This is a disgrace.

It is related that a Jew lived close to the king of mystics.³²³ One day someone spoke to him in great astonishment that a Jew should live close to the king of mystics. Bayazid said to him: "If Islam is what Bayazid has, it doesn't come from me; and if it is what all of you have, I feel disgraced thereby."

This letter should be studied very carefully and attentively so that you may grasp what it means to be a spiritual guide, disciple or dervish. Ignorant men have appeared in the present age and the world has been filled with their discord. All have come into view but, as the prince of the Law³²⁴ has said: "The Hour of Judgement will not come before wickedness is established among men." Everything pertains to it or is a preparation for it. We should wail and lament over ourselves. Nowadays, what else is there left to do? Peace!

Letter 85

LONGING FOR THE WORKS OF THE LIFE TO COME AND ABANDONING AVARICE AND SENSUALITY

I inquired about the state of the world from a learned man:
He said: "It is a breeze, a dream or a fable."
Again I inquired about the state of anyone who binds his heart thereto:
He replied: "He is a demon, a ghoul or a madman."

Old friend, Imam Nizamuddin,³²⁵ prayerful greetings from this poor faqir, Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as Sharaf. Rest assured, O brother, that your excellent letter, with its subtle meanings and refined hints, reached me. I read it with great eagerness. Bygone days and our association of old all came to mind.

For a while we had wandered together like Pleiades,
We had no thought or even fear of separation.

We lived in unalloyed contentment.
God then scattered us like the Great Bear.

Yet, "God does what He wills and commands whatever He wants to" is the tradition that has come to us. In the world, after coming together, there is scattering. One should do what is necessary and give one's consent.

What will a slave do who does not bow his head in obedience?
What will a polo ball do which does not offer itself to be struck?

O brother, how could it be that the pain of separation from friends is not experienced in this world? How could we not taste the bitter sweetness of separation from friends? This is the way things happen.

There is poison instead of wine in the cup of separation:
Utterly bitter are all the days of separation.
As long as I live I shall pray for evil
Upon the one who brought the word 'separation' into the world.

This is all now passed. Your days are drawing to a close. Be alert and realize that paradise, which is created, cannot be obtained together with the world. It would thus be impossible to obtain the Lord, Who is the Creator of paradise, together with the world.

Abandon the world so that your religion may flourish:
Wash your hands of the former in favour of the latter!

Every heart in which the world is entrenched is ruined. A ruined house is not a fitting dwelling for you or me, so how could a ruined heart be fitting for the Lord?

A house is either for furniture or to remind us of a friend.

Thus it is that the abandonment of the world is the fountainhead of all worship. If the world had any power, loyalty, beauty or value then men of insight and knowledge would not have passed it by in order to reach Me.³²⁶ In addition, the prophets and saints, who are the most excellent of men, would not have pronounced a triple divorce.³²⁷ The saying of the Apostle, "God Most Exalted has not created anything less pleasing than the world and, since creating it, He has not looked at it," satisfies the mind in this matter.

Life's remaining span should be spent passing your days in repentance and asking forgiveness and making preparations for your final journey. All other occupations should be set aside.

Abandon the world and prepare for death:
The Way is long: prepare for it.
Even if you collect the entire world together
You will be left, at the end, empty-handed.

You should hold firmly to the fact that the messenger Jesus said to his closest followers: "Be content with a modicum of the world yet with your faith intact, just as worldly people are content with a trace of religion together with their worldly ambitions unimpaired."

I see people who are satisfied with a little religion:
I do not see people content with a taste of the world.

Opt for religion and keep your independence from kings,
Just as kings, for the sake of power, are independent of religion.

If you fritter away your time with your wife and children then you should heed what the Commander of the Faithful, Ali, has said: "Be careful lest you make looking after your wife and children your most important preoccupation. If they are among the friends of God, then God will not allow His friends to be destroyed. On the other hand, if they are enemies of God, then why do you grieve and sorrow over God's enemies?" O brother, all wealth is allotted and "what is allotted neither increases nor decreases."

What is going to happen has already been determined:
Moving ahead or staying still are both the same.
You foolishly run around in search of wealth:
Children get all they need while in their mother's womb.

The grief of the world is scarcely comparable to the grief to come! Thus,
You should be sorrowful! Why did you sell Joseph?

When death arrives it should not find you preoccupied with the world. "As you live so shall you die" comes to mind. When one is done with the world, "Let us seek refuge in God from it. As you die so shall you be raised." Make recompense while there is time, because leisure time is precious. You should attend to your own work, for heedlessness leads to destruction. Occupy yourself with unceasing grief and repentance. Then recite:

When I pass my time in heedlessness,
No work that I do comes to fruition.

What profit is there in all this? May your final end be good, brother! Peace!

Letter 86

BEING AT ENMITY WITH THIS WORLD AND BEFRIENDING THE LIFE TO COME

I inquired of a wise man about the state of the world:
He replied: "It is a breeze, a dream or a fable."
Again I inquired about the state of anyone who binds himself to it:
He replied: "He is a demon, a ghoul or a madman."

O brother, it is related that, on the Day of Resurrection, anyone who has loved this world and been wholly devoted to it will be made to stand up and a herald will cry out: "This is the slave whom the Lord has despised and considers a gelding." He will be seized. The person who said the following is dear:

A hundred worlds of knowledge, together with their explanation,
Are borne to hell, together with the world.
Since you not have flung the world far from your heart,
There is no other place for you except to bum in hell.

What would you say if a physician, an unbeliever, should say to one of us: "Don't eat bread or meat. They are harmful for you." At once we would refrain from eating them. A hundred and twenty-four thousand messengers have come and said, "Love of the world is the fountainhead of all sin," but no one abandons it. People rely on an unbelieving physician, but do not believe a hundred and twenty-four thousand messengers. Thus we should grieve over what we are. How far we are from being Muslims!

Where can we get balm to soothe this pain?
 Our lives have slipped by. What time is left to grieve?
 Abandon the world so that your faith may flourish!
 Get rid of the former in order to embrace the latter.

Rabi'a of Basra used to pray intimately to God, saying; "My God, bestow upon Your enemies whatever worldly portion You have destined for me, and give Your friends the blessings of the world to come which are destined for me. You suffice for me!"

If you want to become a king, abandon the world:
 Otherwise you will be utterly confounded.
 Leave everything behind and put your best foot forward:
 It is good if you have nothing, even for your shroud.

Imam Shibli used to say: "If I were told, 'Accept the world' and 'If you don't accept it, I shall hurl you into hell,' I would accept hell."

The pure ones who come as dervishes
 Are continuously self-effacing.
 In reality they all desire Him:
 Inevitably they struggle with themselves.

O brother, holy men have said that there is nothing in the world that people can rejoice over except what is beneath whatever it is that saddens us, because rejoicing without sorrow and happiness without grief have no place in this world.

The revered Jesus saw an old woman in a miserable condition, black-faced and of hideous appearance. He inquired who she was. "I am the world," she replied. The revered Jesus asked her how many husbands she had had. She replied: "Countless! As for an estimate, if a number be required to be spelt out then I would say, 'So very many.'" After that the revered Jesus inquired: "Did any of those husbands divorce you?" She replied, "No! I killed them all. They are no longer alive, but I continue firm as before."

If a morsel of bread is bestowed upon you,
 Afterwards a hundred calamities will afflict you.
 The work of the world is nothing but a talisman:
 It is nothing other than ruin upon ruin.

Just as it would be astonishing for anyone to weep in paradise, it would be even more astonishing if anyone laughs while still in this world.

O inattentive heart, be alert for but a moment!

You are diverted by many things: be alert!

Grief in this world stems from the lack of grieving over the life to come.

It would cause grief, so why did you sell Joseph?

Every heart in which the world is entrenched is ruined. Neither you nor I want a ruined house, so how could a ruined heart be fitting for the Lord Most Exalted?

To the extent that you are preoccupied with thoughts of the world,
To that extent will you be forever wedded to its ways.

Holy men have said that, if all evils were collected in one house, love of the world would be made its key. On the other hand, if all virtues were collected in one house, enmity towards the world would be made its key.

Take care to do your proper work as long as you live,
Because you won't be able to do anything on the day you die.
Understand the present age so that things may be easy for you:
Otherwise you will experience abundant difficulties.

Finally you must have heard that "the world is Adam's privy." The story related to this is that when the prophet Adam had eaten wheat in paradise he experienced a human need. Paradise, however, is no place for that. A command arrived: "Adam, paradise is no place for that! You will have to go into the world. That is the place for you to attend to nature's call." Thus it is that the world is Adam's privy.

If your faith is not inflamed with love,
This story should be proof enough for you.

If someone nowadays whiles away his time with wife and children it means he hasn't heard this. It is related that the Commander of the Faithful, Ali, said: "Be careful not to make preoccupation with wife and children your principal concern. If they are God's friends, then remember that God does not allow His friends to perish. On the other hand, if they are enemies of the Lord, why are you grieving and sorrowing over God's enemies?"

Death lies in front, yet you trail behind,
Just like a vulture in quest of a carcass.
Sometimes you give Islam, sometimes gold,
In order to give a morsel to your infidel soul.

Letter 87

SEEKING GOD AND ABANDONING CREATURES

O you who are forever roaming the world,
 Tell me what profit there is from all this exertion?
 You yourself are the sign of the very Thing you seek:
 He is wholly with you, and you are looking elsewhere!

Thus it is that men of insight have said that the kingdom is with you; the angelic spirits are with you; dominion is with you; and the Lord of all these is with you. Read, "And He is with you wherever you are" (Q57:4) and grasp what it means.

I do not become Him, yet, without Him
 I know for certain, by God, I would not exist.

The saying, "I am not you, and you do not exist apart from Me" gives an idea of what is meant by this. The following has also been well said:

I am a slave: I seek to please you with my life:
 I am astonished: where should I seek You?
 You are in my life, giving it meaning:
 Since I have found You, why should I seek You?

Although it is like this, yet where is the eye that sees Him, or the ear that hears Him?

Where is the intellect that can attain Your perfection?
 Where is the spirit that can fathom Your glory?
 I admit that You lift the veil that hides Your beauty,
 But where is the eye that can discern Your beauty?

O wonder of wonders, the work is with all, and without all! O Lord, will this enigma be solved at some time, or will it remain as it is, a closed secret? A learned man bewailed this situation and said:

There is a secret hidden in your tresses:
 But what can be done? You don't unravel them for me.

"We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (Q50:16). No matter what thinking attains Him or intellect gives Him shape, grasps something about Him and acquires some understanding of Him, nevertheless, the essence and attributes of the Lord Most Exalted remain holy and unfettered by all that. Even so, He is closer to you than your jugular vein; He is closer to you than your eyesight is to your eyes; He is closer to you than your hearing is to your ears; He is closer to you than your speech is to your tongue; and He is closer to you than your heart's wisdom is to your heart. Whoever composed the following spoke correctly:

O seeker of filth, you show you are dead!
 You are born of union, yet dying of separation.
 Thirsty you stand beside the ocean, yet turning to dust:
 You are seated on a treasure, yet dying as a beggar.

O brother, there is nothing but superficiality in the proximity of creatures to one another. Distance enters therein according to shape, meaning, or thinking. Real proximity pertains to the proximity of the Lord. Real proximity signifies that which is utterly incapable of being put at a distance. When the mirror of the heart becomes purified and illuminated the seeker, by means of that light, knows and sees that the Lord is with everything. There is not a single particle of all existing things about which it could be said that the Lord is not with it, or does not comprehend it, or is unaware of it. When the seeker reaches this stage he says:

My Beloved was watching me, and I didn't know:
 He was with me, shielding me, and I didn't know.
 I said, "I'll seek Him and find out where He is."
 This distracted me from Him, and I didn't know.

Thus it is said that the Way to God is not in heaven, nor is it upon the earth, nor is it concerned with the divine throne, footstool, tablet or pen. The Way to God lies within you. "And within you. Do you not see?" (Q51:21).

The world looks towards the beauty of my countenance:
 The King of all the world is found in my poor heart.
 Tumult and idol-worship, unbelief and firm faith,
 All are found tucked away in my cruel heart.

Letter 88

CONTEMPT FOR THE WORLD AND ITS INFIDELITY

The world is like a coiled viper:
 It is better to wash your hands of it.
 What do these fleeting days bestow upon you?
 One by one everything is taken back from you.
 The world itself knows no other work than this:
 To cause grief and to take life.
 It gives and it takes and holds no surprises:
 It has no work except giving and taking.
 If there is pleasure, a hundred sorrows accompany it:
 If there is a single rose, a hundred thorns surround it.
 The embrace of the world is to be shunned:
 Cast off all trace of it once and for all.
 Don't give your heart to the world, for it is worthless:
 An upright young man is careful of those he deals with.
 Also:
 No one can take as a beloved anyone who,
 As long as he lives, cannot keep faith with another.

The world is an ocean of calamities. It is a river filled with blood. It is a troublesome beloved. It is lovely, but without substance. It is a play filled with astonishing things meant to fill the mind with excitement. It is beautiful but veiled.

It does not walk the straight path. It is a heart without compassion. People derive no profit from it. Whoever is soothed by it in the morning is ignored by it in the evening. Whoever draws breath in the morning is trodden under foot in the evening. Its cup is not bereft of what is vile, nor is its plate empty of the dread of oppression.

Don't drink from its cup, for it contains poison!
 Don't smell its roses, for thorns lie beneath them.
 Perverse fate has no truck with anyone's fidelity:
 Often have we seen, proved and heard this.

"The world is ephemeral. It does not provide stability to anyone. Its blessings are also ephemeral, or even harmful. There is no permanence in what it has to offer. Its embrace is fickle." This old woman remembers having devoured many young kings and having brought to grief many intoxicated lovers.

All the time it is displaying fresh, rosy cheeks:
 In every age it rejoices with a hundred husbands.
 No one has become aware of its magical spell:
 In it one finds nothing but dust and thorns.
 If your heart has grasped the meaning of all this,
 "Abandoning the world" becomes your faith.

This proud world is simply riddled with vice. Its one redeeming feature is that it is the field in which the seed of eternity can be sown, the produce of which is nothing less than eternal life. The world's least fault is that each day, like an unfaithful husband, it bestows its affection on another; or, like a promiscuous harlot, pleasures a different person every hour. It takes back what it has given and demands back what it has bestowed. Like an impudent person it feels no shame about obscene talk. It is foolish and self-centred. It does not distinguish good from evil. Its faults and vices are many. Its crimes and disgraceful acts are innumerable. In spite of this, all lie stupefied at its feet and are enmeshed in seeking and hankering after it.

It so happened that the Way began with Adam:
 He had a throat for a flute, and a belly for a drum.

Letter 89

THE JOY OF FINDING AND THE GRIEF OF NOT FINDING

O brother, the Way to the Lord - may He be glorified and exalted - is one and the same, whether it be from Delhi or Daulatabad.³²⁸ There should be no respite from seeking or from experiencing grief. The heart should experience either the joy of finding or the misery and grief of not finding.

Do away with whatever pertains to the Way and to planning,
 And thus enable your heart to become the abode of God.

If the joy of finding is not experienced as a result of shunning what is unlawful and holding yourself in check, then what was the point of undergoing the misery and grief of not finding?

Your pain has become a balm for me:
 Your dust has become an ornament for me.
 I am ready to sacrifice my life for Your sake:
 Seeing You has become the meaning of my life.

This does not refer simply to you and me. On the contrary, it refers to all who have left this world in sorrow and grief. They have slept in the grave with this sorrow and grief. When they rise from the dead tomorrow they will do so caught up in this sorrow and grief.

Through the pain of religion all the masters of the Way
 Have good deeds which are tinged with their hearts' blood.
 All men of religion suffer from this sorrow:
 Their thirst is insatiable and their hearts are aflame.

It is said that, on the Day of Resurrection, when the members of this group rise from the grave, they will look into their breasts. If they find the slightest trace of their grief missing, they will utter such a cry that the inhabitants of hell will feel pity for them.

May it never happen, O my chosen idol,
 That your love leaves my heart, or your memory, my mind.
 If you seek me after I die, you will find
 That very delight in my rotting bones.

O brother, one who is new has dealings with the Ancient One; and one who has a dwelling-place is numbered with One who does not!

When dust began to work with the Pure One,
 The Throne fell to the ground in front of Adam.

The Beloved's magnificent howdah does not enter the house, yet the unfortunate lover cannot emerge from the depths of the house. What should he do except throw dust on his head and say:

I cannot come to where You are,
 And I know You won't come to where I am.

Imam Shibli - the mercy of God be upon him - says at this stage:

O Guide along the Way, I am perplexed in quest of You:
 I am wholly at a loss: stretch out Your hand to me!

I will abandon my hand if You don't take hold of it!

The lord of apostleship cried out at this stage: "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad!" When a lover, getting ready for union with the Beloved, looks within himself and sees only nothingness, what more does he need?

Even if you shed copious tears on sighting that great field,
 You should approach the door boldly, for it is the King's.
 You bring a hundred lives to bribe the doorkeeper:
 It is said that here no danger to life exists.

The helpless lover is at a loss and, in distress, cries out:

You are my Beloved: I cannot live without You!
 I don't know what medicine to take for union with You.
 As long as love is unfulfilled, my heart is grief-stricken:
 There is no one in this world who does not weep for me.

Glory be to God! Just look at dust and water, and at this enterprise! "I placed part of My soul within him." A beggar has been brought into this affair together with a King, and the craving concerning which the dwellers in the world of holiness and purity are powerless has been placed in this heart.

The wish and desire of a contingent being - what useless imagining!
 The desire of the beauty of the Sultan resides in the heart of a beggar!

Letter 90

THE WAY TO GOD AND THE RENUNCIATION OF ONE'S SELFISH SOUL AND OF CREATURES

The peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon you!

On account of the infidel that has been placed within us,
 The number of Muslims in the world has been reduced.

O brother, don't preoccupy yourself with thinking about how you can perform an abundance of ritual prayers, or how you can observe much fasting. Channel your energies into discovering how you can remove this infidel soul from obstructing your Path. The consensus of opinion among those well versed in the Path is that the Way to God does not lie in heaven or on earth; nor is it found in the east or the west. It is not in the divine throne or footstool, nor in the heavenly tablet or pen. No, the way to the Glorious, Exalted God is found within you.

Begin by listening to the Quran: "And in yourselves. Can you not see?" (Q51:21). Now listen to this group:

O you who are always in the world,
 How does this wandering benefit you? Tell me!
 What you are seeking - as a sign of Him - is you:
 He is wholly with you, yet you seek Him elsewhere!

And that Way which is within you, by means of which you emerge from the veil and reach God, is called by philosophers a rational soul. Jurisconsults call it a spirit, while Sufis call it a spirit, a selfish soul, or a heart.³²⁹ It is called by different names, but the meaning is the same. It is the reality of human nature, which is a manifestation and a mirror of the secret of the reality of the Godhead.

Until Adam's soul was made manifest
 People did not know the Way to the Omnipotent.
 The Way appeared along with Adam:

In him appeared the key to both worlds.

Also:

You thirst for the Ocean, yet remain separated from it:
You are seated on a Treasure, and yet you are begging.

It is known that a world filled with holy and pure angels prostrated itself before dust, and that dust was the representative of God. "For God created Adam according to His own image," i.e. according to what He himself is like, bears witness to this. The infidel soul, however, has taken hold of this Way. Don't you know that the king of mystics, during intimate converse with God, said: "My God, which is the way to You?" The reply came: "Leave your selfish soul behind and ascend!" Thus it is that, for a seeker after God, his spiritual state makes it imperative for him to remove his selfish soul from the Way. A person who wears a sacred thread, or goes into a tavern and drinks his fill, is also engaged in the great struggle with his infidel soul until it is removed from the Way.

If the thought of my Beloved comes to me in a temple,
It would be a sin against reason to walk around the Ka'ba.
If the Ka'ba has no aroma of Him, it is a fire-temple:
With the aroma of union with Him, a fire-temple becomes my Ka'ba.

What should be done? It is said: "God denied that there was any Path to Himself for anyone enmeshed in his selfish soul." There is no Way to Him as long as the infidel soul exists. This infidel soul has to be removed from the Way! The spiritual state of the seeker compels him to do this. People caught up in externals and in habit see what is external and become engrossed in their own nonsensical speech. They do not know that "there is meaning in wine not found in grapes." Poison, which is deadly and forbidden, in a number of situations is used as a medicine. When, through the divine grace and eternal benevolence, a seeker acquires this favour and has removed this infidel soul from the Way, he will find What he has been seeking; reach his appointed Goal; and see What he wanted to see. With a heart brimming over with joy he will cry out:

My Beloved was there before me, and I knew it not:
He was there with me, and I knew it not.
I said: "I'll have to go somewhere in search of Him!"
This distracted my attention from Him, and I knew it not.

O brother, since you are acquainted with this work and are prepared for it, this work has been bestowed upon you. You also have enough time to devote yourself to it. Much can be gleaned from the collected writings of Sufis, as well as from the kinds of words and actions of the seekers that have come down to us in written form. Nevertheless you, O brother, should make a supreme effort to reach What you are aiming at - God willing!

Of you a great effort is required
For that Treasure to be revealed to you.
Along the Way that leads to the Treasure
Doubt not that sorrow also will be found.

Strive day and night in sorrow's lane!
Suddenly the Treasure will reveal Itself to you.

After studying this letter you should tear it up so that the person raving away like this does not become infected by his own ravings!

Letter 91

STIMULATING DESIRE AND FOSTERING CAUTION

Dearest son, Qazi Husamuddin, "may God grant you insight into the faults of your soul and help you purify it before death takes hold of you!" O son, that bold and impudent claim in Pharaoh's soul concerned the Glorious and Exalted Lord, "I am your lord most high" (Q79:24), is present in every soul. He spoke out openly, claiming "I am your lord most high." Others say it in secret. His proud claim was made openly, while that of others is made in secret.

Because of this infidel which is placed within us
We find there are few Muslims in the world.

God willing, my son, may you gradually perceive what this means and find divine guidance so that this infidel soul is removed from the Way and thus you can gain admittance to the court of "There is no god but God." If death arrives while you are keeping company with this infidel soul, "according to their company, so shall be their death" would become operative. "Whoever takes Satan as an associate, an evil associate has he" (Q4:38). He would be an intimate friend and companion of Satan.

That is the most profitable thing of all for you:
When you die, that is your cash in hand for tomorrow.
Comfort and effort are both removed from here:
Hell and paradise are both removed from here.

Tomorrow, when you rise from the grave, "they will die as they lived" will be revealed. That is why a wise man said: "Of a thousand, one will be for the Compassionate One and nine hundred and ninety-nine for Satan."³³⁰

How could anyone who finds this difficult
Be able to do it, even with a hundred hearts?
O that my name had never been,
Nor that I had been upset or at peace!
O that my mother had never given birth to me
And there had been no need to kill my infidel soul!

This story is a long one. It has no end.

Night passed, yet news of Me did not attain the limit:
What could night do? News of Me is quite extensive.

We have come to the fact that you, my son, under the impulse of the good opinion which you have of this poor person, have decided to bind yourself to me

and have made a request for a cap. I have accepted you, my son, and intend to send you a cap which belonged to my own spiritual guide.³³¹ It will serve as a bond concerning this work. Gather together some dervishes belonging to the Sufi confraternity. First of all express sincere repentance in their presence and renew your faith. Then set out manfully upon the Way. Like a righteous disciple place the cap on your head and imagine you have mastered this work and have flung the world behind you. Fix your attention on the life to come and say: "O Lord, we have harmed ourselves and, if You had not forgiven us and shown mercy to us, we would have been lost." Give thanks again and again and, day by day, transform yourself by means of the actions, deeds and good works of this group. You will become convinced that you will reach their stage and their state of soul and will receive a portion of their blessings and spiritual wealth. In both this life and the next you will be under their protection.

Everybody in Daulatabad has a copy of the *Letters*³³² of this poor person. Have a copy made for yourself and have it continually before you. Study its contents repeatedly and with undivided attention. God willing, the principles and important points of this school; the way of proceeding of this confraternity; and the actions of this group will become known from those letters, for "the pen is one of the two tongues." A disciple either hears what his guide says or reads what he writes. If it is impossible to hear what he says, he should pay attention to what he has written and act accordingly. The way of acting has been described thus by Khwaja Attar:

A guide along the Way is as rare as the philosopher's stone:
 His breast has become like a dark green ocean.
 Son, the Way is long and filled with dangers:
 Whoever travels this Way needs a guide.
 If you enter the Way without a guide,
 And every hill is levelled, you will fall into a well.
 How can a blind man walk straight?
 It is a sin for a blind man to walk without a staff.
 If you experience pain your guide will appear,
 As will the key to unlock your pain.

Letter 92

HELPING THE DISTRESSED AND SUPPORTING THE NEEDY

By means of the world you are able to buy the life to come:
 Go ahead and buy it, my friend, otherwise you will grieve.

I would like it to be clear to my dear and close friends in that area that Khwaja Haji, who has visited the holy places in Mecca and Medina and is the bearer of this letter from this dervish, is a man with a family. Paucity of the means of livelihood has made him restless and anxious. For this reason he has determined which particular dear and close friends he will visit. Since your generous disposition prompts you to meet the needs and necessities of those in

need, thus securing the treasure of everlasting life for yourselves, please bring as much tranquillity as you can to his agitated heart. God Most Exalted will bring tranquillity to your own precious hearts in this life and in the next, by means of His grace and favour.

My dear friends, you know that the faults of this world, though they be in the hundreds, are such that they can neither be written down nor recited. Nevertheless, in spite of all these faults, its virtue is that, for the blessed, it is the field of preparation for the life to come. For this reason it is said that the world was glorified, but it was glorified for the sake of man, "the blessing of apt goods is for the proper person." It has been expressed thus by Khwaja Attar:

Since you acted thus, the world is good for you:
Befriend the world for the sake of your faith.
Don't immerse yourself in the world:
Rather, embrace therein the work of the world to come.

Especially for nobles and kings, as well as all who hold positions of power and rank, there is no path leading more quickly to God, the Glorious and Exalted One, than this. A wise man was asked how many ways there were to God. He replied: "As many as all existing particles, but there is no path that leads a person more quickly or effectively than that of bringing comfort to hearts." This is the path that we have embraced and which we have bequeathed to our disciples.

From this we can understand why, in an important gathering, it was said: "The king of this city keeps vigil of a night and performs many supererogatory prayers and also keeps extra fasts. " The reply came: "The unfortunate fellow has lost his way and has taken up the work of others." Those present inquired: "O Sheikh, which path should he follow?" He replied: "His path and his work is to order his cooks to prepare various kinds of dishes and delicacies and allow the hungry to eat their fill. He should have various kinds of apparel stitched and bestowed upon those who have no clothes. He should refresh the broken-hearted and assist those in need. Keeping vigils, performing supererogatory prayers and keeping extra fasts are the tasks of dervishes."

Letter 93

SEEKING HIDDEN UNBELIEF AND HIGHLIGHTING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MUSLIM

O You from whom both worlds came to be,
Not from the soul, but the soul came from You.
O You, whose sight lies hidden from eyes and soul,
Intellect and understanding are lost in Your work.
O Soul of the world, all are astonished at You!
A hundred thousand intellects are in a whirl over You.

O brother, your letter arrived. It was studied carefully. Praise be to God! After you left there was no change for the worse in the work, nor did any calamity occur, even though there had been so much fear that something might happen.³³³

O brother, realize that close friends and relations, wife and children, whoever draws your attention away from God, comes under "Whatever draws you away from God is, for you, an idol." Intercede with the Friend of God, "Lo, they are enemies of mine, except for the Lord of the worlds" (Q.26:77). Khwaja Attar says:

When you consider everything except God as inimical,
Even Gabriel should not come before your gaze!

At length this will apply to you: "Haven't you heard in the story about the Friend of God, 'An agreeable friend in the faith is indeed precious.' If one is found it would be unusual." "A companion, then the Way" is an injunction of the Law. Khwaja Attar says:

It would be wonderful to have an understanding friend!
If one comes to hand, how privileged a person would be.
The wise have put it well in this regard:
One companion for the home, but many for the Way.

"He that rejects idols and puts his faith in God shall grasp the firmest handle that will never break" (Q2:256). O brother, stand firm so this infidelity may not occur, namely, anything that involves an idol. How could anyone then see the beauty of "and puts his faith in God?" Realize that the idol of "what draws you away from God" refers to anything else. A dervish has said: "Each person's idol is his selfish soul." Unbelief here refers to severing. Concerning this meaning it is said: "Lover, beloved and love constitute the world of multiplicity. In the world of oneness there would undoubtedly be only One." The writer of the following lines has given a hint about this:

In duality the intellect is truly distorted:
The eyes of faith see nothing of duality.
If someone needed to count there would be work for one:
Otherwise there would undoubtedly be much grief.

Remain recollected and occupied, according to the saying: "Remain until the time arrives when We make you an example of Our own world till the end." When you have attained this unbelief you will have become a genuine believer. Nothing 'else' remains. Whatever appears within you would be from His world, and you would be an intermediary sign.

When you emerge completely from body and soul
You won't remain, God alone will, and peace.

"He hears through me, sees through me, seizes through me and walks through me" has thrown some light on this. "You did not throw but God threw" (Q8:17) is also an indication of this. States, meanings and whatever provides an opening and enkindles what is within, all bubble up from the depths to the surface and cry out from the abode of love, "Can there be more?" Imam Shibli says: "O

guides along the Path of astonishment, lead me further along this Path!" There is a demand for more.

Even if you gulp down a hundred oceans,
Be like a mountain, not noisy like an ocean.

When you look within yourself you will find everything completely vanquished. Once again give thanks. A conversion has occurred. Now movement lends a hand to desire. Afterwards let the wealth of the attraction of "this divine attraction is equivalent to the work of men and jinn" display its beauty. At this stage walking is turned into flying. In this condition this verse may be heard:

You have attained maturity in the world of mystical knowledge:
You have become free of your self, as well as of this and of that.

O brother, your qualities establish and confirm you. If qualities go on remaining so too will the one qualified. This would mean multiplicity. "Oneness does not associate with it."

There was an outcry: "Two kings within a kingdom!"
"Either you or I."

O seeker of pearls, seek every 'but:'
Place the cup of life on the shore of 'but.'
Until you have swept 'no' from your Path,
You will not reach the abode of "but God."³³⁴

Mercy be upon the soul of Khwaja Attar who said:

I don't know whether I'm anything or whether I'm not:
Since everything is He, finally who am I?

This is a difficult matter for everybody. How can this enigma be solved? At this stage some mystics say: "It is better to put to death whoever speaks openly about divine oneness than to bring someone back to life. This is because speaking openly about the secret of divine lordship is disbelief. If this secret is openly made public then prophethood would diminish in esteem. Making known the prophetic commands is what nourishes faith and upholds the Law. This secret should remain concealed. In this way the basis of religion and its improvement and regulation would perdure and God would watch over what He has commanded. There are three kinds of knowledge. Externalist scholars speak about external knowledge. Internal knowledge is for people with an interior disposition. The third type is that which is a secret between God and its recipient. That is the very reality of faith. This type of knowledge should not be shared with any scholars."

O brother, here a person is in the mode of intellect and that knowledge which can be expressed in writing and is susceptible to interpretation. This work, however, is such as to render intellect and knowledge bankrupt and indigent.

As far as this sort of work we face is concerned,
Knowledge is bankrupt and intellect found wanting.

Pay attention to what can be written, particularly to all the signs mentioned here. May you pass beyond them all one day!

Love is more exalted than intellect or soul:

"For me, to be with God" is how the intrepid pass their time.

The intellect cannot handle unbelief and religion:

What does love have to do with unbelief or religion?

Today we experience love: what will tomorrow bring?

Unbelief and religion are here, but what will be there?

Here thoughts necessarily occur to our minds. O brother, realize that difficulties beset the intellect concerning existence and nothingness. The way love works, however, is more exalted than that of the intellect.

For the intelligent the Law poses a difficulty,

Whereas love ennobles those without hearts.

"Love is a divine madness." What pertains to an intelligent person does not pertain to one madly in love.

No matter what comes from one madly in love,

The order comes quickly to forgive him.

You are you: that is the source of love and hatred:

You are you: that is the source of unbelief and faith.

What has been given here is indicative in nature. When you study the verses and sayings of this group you will understand the source of this and pass beyond it until a time comes when what is said makes sense beyond knowledge and intellect. When a person reaches this stage he will understand and perceive that it is like this.

Love shares its secret only with a severed head,

For it knows that the head would inform on it!

Letter 94

THE HUMILITY AND GENTLENESS OF THE FRIEND

To Sheikh Maghribi.³³⁵ From Sharaf Maneri, who is ashamed of his failings and confounded by his faults. As long as he lives he will repent and grieve over them. Greetings of peace and an abundance of good wishes!

Your presence in my heart is like life in my body and blood in my veins:

I don't forget You for a moment, so how could You be remembered?

Malik Husamuddin arrived from Kara³³⁶ and conveyed your greetings, O brother. He painted a picture of eternal wealth and everlasting happiness. Praise be to God on account of this! When Malik Husamuddin returned I sent a letter along with him for you, my brother. God willing it must have reached you. You are living in Bisnala,³³⁷ which is an out-of-the-way place. Not everyone passes by that place, nor is it possible for one and all to visit you. That is why it is not

possible to send you letters and personal mementoes. If this were not so, they would be sent on a regular basis.

As long as a few days of life remain my attention should be on this unfortunate one. My resolve must be concerned with this poor one until God Most Exalted releases me from this confinement. What should I do? My ankles are loaded with fetters. The Law does not allow me to go. If this were not so, in no time at all I would come and be the door-keeper at the mosque where you live and would grieve over myself.

If You bestow upon me a thousand lives,
At your blessed feet I would be Your mace.

How much this unfortunate one desires to leave India and associate with Muslims and pass his time in being of service to dervishes, yet becoming a Muslim means no turning back to the very end. God knows the state of this unfortunate one. What will happen? At all events, till the end of his days the sacred thread has not been cut from around his neck, nor has the beauty of the One God been seen. His days are drawing to a close in idol-worship among unbelievers and polytheists. He is surrounded by them all the time. Apart from idols, sacred threads, unbelief and polytheism, nothing else is to be seen. Alas! Alas! Alas!

In this tumult which brought woe to my soul
Fighting and killing are abandoned: one pursuit remains.

"Whoever is abandoned by the Lord is abandoned by all." This unfortunate one experiences the difficulties of both worlds. "And anyone who has been blind in this life" (Q17:72)³³⁸ does not pass by the hem of this unfortunate one's garment. How could things be arranged?

Where should I go? What should I do? For whom should I intercede?
How can I bring back the heart which has escaped from my grasp?

Another astonishing thing is that one man calls me a sheikh, while another becomes my disciple; one writes "Prince of the Sheikhs" and another calls me "The Pole Star of the Saints." Up till now, however, I have not seen the face of a Muslim, nor has the thread of my unbelieving soul been cut loose from around my neck. What a disgracel Peace be upon the soul of him who said:

A Sufi clothed in green; a sheikh; master of the forty-day retreat:
You became all of these, but were not yet a Muslim!

The state of this dust-covered, unfortunate one, O brother, finds expression in words and writing. The following couplet can be taken as an extremely profitable warning:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

Now, except for weeping for my friends and falling down at the doors of the lovers of God, crying out in supplication to them, what more can be done? In order to increase your own wealth and blessings, look upon this poor beggar! At

the proper time "there is a time for me with God" will reveal its meaning. This unfortunate one would like to be taken by the Lord of Grandeur.

I would have slipped from Your hand if You had not caught hold of mine.

Seek, otherwise you won't find the door:
Let me become nothing in this desolation.

At all times God's friends and intimates extend a hand to any friend of the work who has stumbled. As long as the world has existed things have been like this.

One of God's friends comes to the aid of one who stumbles along the Way.

The mistakes and faults of this unfortunate one are unquestionable and they have been repented of. Don't pay attention to them! Focus on your own generosity and good fortune for, from an unfortunate one, simply oppression is to be expected, whereas loyalty is expected from one who is favoured. From an unblessed person come faults, while honour springs from a blessed one.

Look at Your own mercy, not at my sins:
I am full of sins, from head to toe.

Letter 95

JUSTICE AND THE VINDICATION OF THE OPPRESSED

These pieces of advice have been copied from a letter which had been written to the Sultan of the East, Firuz Shah.³³⁹ It contained a petition on behalf of Khwaja Abid Zafarabadi, whose property had been destroyed by oppression.

It is related that Bilal, the muezzin, said: "I was seated along with the Messenger in Abu Bakr's house in Mecca. Someone came and knocked on the door. The Prophet told me to go and see who it was. When I came outside I saw a Christian standing there. He asked me if Muhammad was inside. I said he was. He came inside at once and said: 'O Muhammad, you claim to be an apostle of God. You say that He has sent you. You invite one and all to embrace the Islamic faith. If you are in fact an apostle, you will not allow a strong man to oppress a weak one like me.' The Messenger said: 'Who has oppressed you?' 'Abu Jahl has taken away some of my goods.' Immediately the Messenger got up. It was siesta time and very hot. He set out to assist the oppressed man. I said: 'O Apostle of God, it is siesta time, and very hot. It is most likely that Abu Jahl is taking a siesta. He will get angry.' He did not, however, sit down, but kept on going in an angry mood. He rapped on the door of Abu Jahl's house, so much so that Abu Jahl got angry and swore by his goddesses, Lat and Uzza, that he would kill the man who was beating upon his door. When he came outside he saw the Apostle standing there.

He said: 'Come in! Why didn't you send someone to me?' The Messenger angrily retorted: 'Why have you seized the goods of this Christian? Give him back what belongs to him!' He replied: 'Is that what you have come for? Why

didn't you send a companion through whom I could return them?' The Prophet replied: 'Don't make a lengthy speech, simply give him back what is his!' Abu Jahl brought out everything and handed it over to the Christian. The Messenger said: 'O Christian, now you have got your goods back.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'except for one sewing-needle.' The Messenger said: 'Give him back his needle!' Abu Jahl replied: 'O Muhammad, you can go back, I'll return it.' The Apostle refused to go until the needle was returned. Abu Jahl went inside but couldn't find the needle, so he brought out a better one. He said: 'I couldn't find his needle so I've brought out this one in exchange. It's a better one than his was.' The Messenger asked the Christian if this were true. On being assured that it was, he said: 'O Christian, if you had said it wasn't, I would not have gone until I had extracted its price from him and handed it over to you.'"

It is also related as coming from the Prophet that, whoever befriends an oppressed person will in turn be befriended by God Most Exalted. On the Day of Resurrection He will help him cross over the bridge called Sirat and ensure that he reaches paradise. On the other hand, whoever looks down upon an oppressed person will find that he will cry out to him but the cry will not touch him. Such a one will be lashed by fire a hundred times inside the grave.

It is also related by Anas³⁴⁰ that the Messenger said that whoever befriends an oppressed person will find seventy-three favourable things written beside his name. One would be the improvement of his work in this world while seventy-two would pertain to his state in the world to come.

Malik ibn Anas also related that a caravan had come to a halt outside the city. Umar Khattab said to Abdur Rahman bin Auf: "Come, let us keep guard over the caravan which has halted outside the city. It wouldn't be good if, while they were asleep, someone were to come and steal some of their goods." So they went and kept watch all night long. God Most Exalted praised the companions of the Messenger on account of this: "He showed mercy to them." He has been merciful to all Muslims and has tasted the sorrow of Muslims in this fashion.

Praise be to God that nowadays we have such an exalted yet kind monarch who is the refuge of the oppressed and distressed! At his court justice and equity have made their appearance in this world. In this way happiness has been attained. The Messenger has said: "One hour of justice is better than sixty years of worship."

May your end be good!

Letter 96

THE PERFECTION OF HUMILITY AND HUMANE BEHAVIOUR

Written to Dawar Malik, son-in-law of Sultan Muhammad,³⁴¹in answer to his letter. "There is no god except Him!" From Sharaf Maneri, a mangy dog at the threshold of the scholars. Prayerful greetings! I approach the threshold of your exalted office together with a thousand expressions of bashfulness and shame,

as well as with thousands of excuses and signs of abjectness. Thus I, this black-faced dog, express my wonder that the Minister of Religious Endowments should address me with so many expressions of humility. All that I can say is to repeat the complaint made to musk to the effect that it had only one fault. It inquired what it was. It was told: "You share your fragrance alike with people who are important as well as with nobodies." It replied: "I don't pay attention to whom I am sharing myself with. I simply look at who I am." If this were not so, how could it have happened that you, an exalted minister, addressed me as "Prince of the Sheikhs" and "Pole Star of the Saints" and claim to be a follower of mine?

Alas! Alas! My works have not gone beyond those of people who are insolent, disloyal and accursed, no more than dust, with heads hung in shame; idolaters and wearers of sacred threads; while the people, on account of the hypocrisy of a mindless one like myself, have formed a groundless opinion of me.

It is related that a certain eminent person recited the funeral prayers over someone. Afterwards he heard that the man had a very good reputation in the city. He said: "If I had known this before, I would not have recited his funeral prayers." He was asked why he said this. He replied: "Unless a man becomes a hypocrite he won't acquire a good name among the people. And if it is merely a question of being widely known, why, Satan is far better known than I am!"

O eminent leader, Islam is not the sort of religion that displays the beauty of its visage before every defiled and unwashed fellow, for "none but the purified may touch" (Q56:79).³⁴² The following was attached to the door of a scholar: "Most of them do not believe in God unless they associate others with Him" (Q12:106). A scholar was expelled by the Lord of Oneness himself. The work of religion is not so easy as to be possible for everyone. Those who have been endowed with perspicacity in religion have seen everything just as it is. They have become engrossed in the reality of the enterprise and say: "O God, make of me such a nothingness as would have no existence of its own!" Some have donned a girdle and have entered the circle of the fire-worshippers, as though setting aside knowledge and intellect, and all of them say:

He doesn't listen to learning, so let us seal our lips!
He doesn't prize intelligence, so let us become madmen!

It is also said:

Become a madman with God,
But be astute with the Law!

This is what it's all about, yet if anyone today calls his own customs and habits 'Islam,' then that is another matter. The answer to this is the same as has been said:

If you are intoxicated this evening, tomorrow you'll be overcome with love.

At the point of death, "We have removed your veil" (Q50:22) becomes manifest. It will become apparent whether you are wearing a turban or a sacred thread; whether you are sincere or hypocritical; whether you are in a hermitage or an idol-temple.

When the dust settles you will see,
Whether you are astride a horse or a donkey.

Letter 97

SEEKING THE SOUGHT ONE THROUGH WHAT PERTAINS TO HIM

If you don't find the burden in the Ka'ba,
Befriend a Brahmin in an idol-temple!

O brother, a servant of God is one thing; an ascetic is something else; while a dervish is yet again different. "When poverty is perfect, God appears." What were you doing with regard to the ascetics and servants of God? People look for gold in a banker's office, not in the store of a shopkeeper or a greengrocer! You had turned aside, O brother. Inevitably those dear ones presented what pertained to themselves. What else could they do? It is not known whether you had gone in search of these goods or in quest of God. If you had gone in search of these goods then you have obtained them and have attained your goal. Be content and rejoice! Be a sheikh with disciples! Be in charge of a Sufi hospice and an assembly-hall! Issue invitations and preside over a gathering every day!

But if you went in quest of God then, for a person seeking God, all these things are idols and sacred threads in view of the life to come. Finally you must have heard: "Being engrossed in the study of the Law and in the recitation of the Quran are praiseworthy pursuits, but the dignity of a seeker is something else." There is a hint about this in the following:

O foolish fellow, you were a lion but are now a fox:
You are thirsty, yet an Ocean lies beneath your feet.
Although thirsty, you cut yourself off from the Ocean:
You are seated on a Treasure, yet you are begging.
If you find the way to the very depths of your being,
You will unceasingly see yourself excelling the angels.

Glory be to God, if a seeker after God does not experience the joy of finding, then the trials and grief of not finding will be his. By means of the trials and grief of only one day, seventy or eighty years of the asceticism of the ascetics and the worship of the devout can be purchased. Mercy be upon the soul of Attar who said:

Unbelief for the unbeliever, religion for the religious:
For Attar's heart, just a touch of Your pain!

O brother, nowadays the qualities of a dervish have become as scarce as the philosopher's stone. "One hears but does not see." This work is beyond ascetics and servants, as well as superficial people and slaves of habit and custom, for they are idol-worshippers. This is no way to obtain the Desired Object.

The pain of love came, balm for every heart:
No problem was ever solved without love.
If you have pain, a guide will appear:

A key will appear to release your pain.

Be a dervish in your seeking. Life, which is the origin of the work, has passed by and grief and penitence remain.

O foolish one, we have thrown away body and soul:
We have not recognized at all the value of the soul.
Thirsty we go forth into every storm,
Yet the water is wholly from the Fountain of Life.

Well, what should you do? As far as possible remain engaged in the work in the time that still remains. Remove from before you this valueless veil which is called the selfish soul, a being, and a self. It is your strict duty to see that it is dislodged, otherwise it will overpower you. This is an imperative of your state, whether by means of a mosque or an idol-temple, a turban or a sacred thread. This is the example of which it is said: "Meaning is found in wine, not in grapes."

If the thought of my Beloved comes to me in an idol-temple
It would be a crime against reason to walk around the Ka'ba.
If the Ka'ba has no scent of Him, it is a church:
Yet a church is my Ka'ba, if His fragrance is there.

One beloved of God has said:

If you remain within the veil of your being,
You will forever remain veiled to the Friend.
If you set about the ruin of self,
You will become self-less and hasten to Him.

Khwaja Attar says:

You have distorted what you have lost:
It is within you, and you are a curtain for yourself.

It is also said:

The Friend is in the house, while we roam around the world.

This is what pertains to dust and water. What do you see? Look at the way dust and water have been fashioned! A world filled with pure, hallowed angels prostrates before it. Dust and water have become a vicegerent. Listen to what Khwaja Attar has to say:

Until the soul of Adam was made aware,
He did not know the Way to God.
The Way appeared when Adam appeared:
With him appeared the key to both worlds.

I have written what has occurred to me. "The things men love become their religion." It is clear what your aim is, O brother, yet be careful, for the sages have said: "What you aim at is what you worship." If you say a thousand times, "There is no god but God," what profit would it be?

If the merit of the entire world were to be yours,
All would still be pain, as long as you exist.

We have come to the limit of what this helpless one can write. No matter how much of an idol-worshipper or in the grip of his selfish soul he may be, "a

loss for this world and the next," apart from those devoted to God he has no friend in this world or the next. Heart and soul he is at the service of others, yet he is also their curtain. He greets them and returns their greetings. He also makes his apologies.

I exist, and an astonishing wilderness, and some lost travellers:
Proceed cautiously, O Khwaja, as you have no companion.

May you have a good end! Amen, and peace!

Letter 98

BEARING THE BURDEN OF BEING A LOVER WITHOUT THE BELOVED

To Bayazid.

O friend of love's lane, be patient:
The injustice of the good afflicts a friend.

The peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon you, my brother! On the day when the model of lovers³⁴³ attained splendour by being crucified, Imam Shibli prayed: "My God, why do You kill so many of Your lovers?" He received the reply: "So that compensation for bloodshed may be obtained." He said: "O Lord, what compensation do You offer?" He received the reply: "The beauty of My countenance," for "I kill him and I am his compensation."

The person at Your threshold has been slain by love:
How can I tell a tale of two hundred thousand words?

An afflicted one was crying out. An angel received this command: "Leave him alone in his trial and difficulty! His cries are very pleasing to Me."

Whoever seeks the kingdom of separation,
Is hoping for the kingdom of divine oneness.
There should be no defilement within him
While, externally, there should be no rest.

We gave Pharaoh four hundred years of dominion and prosperity. If he had wanted an hour of the pain, burning desire and hunger of Moses, We would not have given it to him.

O friend, We have not given Pharaoh affliction of mind
Because he does not grasp the secret of Our pains.

The Prophet said: "Without doubt God puts believers to the test through trials just as you refine gold in the fire." It is a time for patience. One should play the man. The Word of the Most Exalted is: "O you who believe, be patient and persevere in patience. Stand firm in your faith" (Q3:200). This is explained thus: "Be patient with your body in devotion. In times of trial or difficulty, keep your hearts at peace. Keep to yourself the secrets of your love and experience of God." All these things can be said, and God be with you!

Give me a heart and see how courageous I become:
Call me Your fox and see me become a lion.

Praise be to God, O brother, for you have acquired this wealth. Moreover, it is fitting that those who are penniless and beggars should not pass on without receiving a portion. It is the time for prayer to be answered. Young men should not eat alone. "It is not good for a person to eat alone."

O what comfort for a heart if, during its lifetime,
It can be near Him for the twinkling of an eye!

Letter 99 ASKING PARDON

Most dear brother Nasiruddin, full of piety, peace and greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Read them attentively and become convinced of my brotherly feelings. Chiding, brotherly letters have reached me on two occasions. It is pleasing to receive two chiding letters as requital and compensation for one fault! Nevertheless, it is necessary for me to ask pardon. Nobility of mind obliges a person to forgive! "Asking pardon, however tentatively, is the price of sin, no matter how great it may be."

O brother, you have been generous on many occasions. You have visited this poor person at opportune and inopportune times. There is an opportune time for meeting and an inopportune one. I heard that you had come here this time but there had not been any opportunity for a meeting.

Human effort proves fruitless:
What God has ordained takes place.

As far as chiding and blaming are concerned, this unfortunate one is an example for all. The author of the following drew attention to this:

If you travel towards the divine command,
You will read by day what has been written at night.
Those who befriend their hearts
Keep them far from 'why' and 'wherefore.'

Shah bin Suja³⁴⁴ said: "Whoever looks at people with his own eyes will experience an increase of enmity, while whoever looks at people with God's eyes, no matter what state they be in, will find them worthy of forgiveness." O brother, fix your gaze on the divine command and you will find that all are able to be excused. You will see this whole discussion set aside.

In duality the intellect is distorted:
The eyes of faith see nothing of duality.

Among the people of today every conflict and altercation comes from seeing what is other than God. Whoever has seen in a distorted fashion has come to altercation. If you saw clearly, you would not get caught up in altercations, or in

chiding or blaming others. "Unity is not associated with Him." This is the faith of believers in One God.

When a drop of water is lost in the Ocean
Could both worlds, apart from God, be gain for it?

Letter 100

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE REALITY OF SAINTHOOD OVER THAT OF PROPHETHOOD

Your letter reached me, brother, and was studied thoroughly. The interpretations commonly given concerning the saying of Sheikh Sa'duddin Hamuya,³⁴⁵ "Sainthood is more eminent than prophethood," have been well understood.

O brother, realize that there is extensive scope for interpretation. For this reason there is place for all the interpretations that are offered. Interpretation describes the meaning. It does not get rid of it. Moreover, brother, you were saying that everything should be in favour of the prophets. Let me explain the matter.

A messenger has two faces. One is turned towards God, the Glorified and Exalted, while the second face is turned towards the people. This is because he conveys to the people what he receives from God. The face which is turned towards God is called 'sainthood.' He conveys to the people what he receives from God. The meaning of sainthood is 'nearness.' The face which is turned towards the people is called 'prophethood.' Prophethood means 'to make aware.' A saint is a person who is close to God, while a prophet is one who makes people aware of Him. Sainthood and prophethood are two qualities of a prophet. A saint has one of these two qualities. For this reason sainthood is certainly more eminent than prophethood, and both of these are concerned with prophets. And God knows best.

All of this is because that wise man said: "Sainthood is more eminent than prophethood." Some were of the opinion that this discussion was about prophets and saints. This is not so. The discussion is concerned with whether the quality of sainthood is stronger than that of prophethood, both being with respect to prophets. Peace!

Letter 101

A DESCRIPTION OF NATURE FROM ECSTATIC CONTEMPLATION

The peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon you! What you requested, brother, does not pertain to the knowledge of ordinary affairs. It stems from ecstatic

contemplation. It is not permitted to put to pen knowledge which has been derived from ecstasy.

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
 In their innermost hearts they struggle with self-effacement.
 All accept the wine proffered by the Friend:
 They play with their heads, yet conceal divine secrets.

What can be said is described as follows. Existing beings which can be experienced are referred to as the world of sensible beings. Existing beings which can be understood are referred to as the world of intelligible beings. Existing beings with power are referred to as the world of power-endowed beings. Whatever is beyond this is referred to as the world of divinity.³⁴⁶ In addition to this explanation sensible beings are also called the world of witnessing; intelligible beings, the world of the hidden; power-endowed beings as the hidden world of what is hidden; and the Glorified, Exalted Lord as the hidden world of the hidden of the hidden.

This has been further elaborated thus. The refinement of the world of sense has no relationship to the world of intelligible beings, for the world of intelligible beings is extremely refined. In addition, the refinement of the world of intelligible beings has no relationship to the refinement of the world of power-endowed beings, for this is the very refinement of its refinement. Moreover, the refinement of power-endowed beings is not related to the refined world of the holy essence of the Praised and Glorified Lord, for the Lord is the very quintessence of refinement.

There is not a single particle of the entire world of sense which is separated from intelligible beings or not embraced by them. In addition, there is not a single particle of sensible or intelligible beings which is separated from power-endowed beings or not contained by them. Moreover, there is no single particle of sensible beings, intelligible beings or power-endowed beings, which is separated from the Glorious and Exalted Lord or not encompassed by Him or comprehended by Him. "He is the Penetrating Knower," for He knows unconditionally. Since He is the unrestricted Knower, He comprehends everything in an unrestricted manner for, the greater the refinement, the greater the comprehension. Thus: "And He is with you wherever you are" (Q57:4), and "We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (Q50:16).

What you have lost you have distorted:
 Within you is you, a curtain for yourself.
 The Treasure for which the heavens are revolving,
 That Treasure is, for certain, within your soul.

This is why it is said that sensible being is with you; intelligible being is with you; power-endowed being is with you; and the Glorious, Exalted Lord is with you. This is why it is also said that the reality of human nature is to be the manifestation and mirror of the secret of the divine reality.

Man is not a mixture of water and dust:
 Man is upright in stature, with a pure soul.
 There existed a hundred angelic worlds:

What can clear water do, if not prostrate?
 Until Adam's soul became aware,
 The Way to the Creator was not known.
 The Way appeared when Adam did:
 With him appeared the key to both worlds.

Nothing more than this can be written. The gibbet of capital punishment is at work.

Take care not to speak out in public!
 If you are a genuine lover, keep it secret.
 You saw how, intoxicated with love, a hint
 Was uttered by Hallaj, and he mounted a gibbet.

Letter 102

KEEPING THE SECRET HIDDEN AND OBEYING THE LAW

To a dear friend.

If secrets were revealed to you while you were at work,
 Keep these secrets hidden; they are meant to be concealed.
 Restrain heart from desiring and tongue from speaking:
 Consider that happiness itself lies in the erasing of self.

O brother, the final charge laid upon the scholars of this community by the Apostle is this: "Tell people what they can understand, but refrain from telling them what they cannot understand. Do you want to make liars out of God and His Apostle?" The fear and dread this charge induces in the souls of scholars and mystics is similar to that of hell upon the souls of the enemies of God on the Day of Resurrection.

If anyone reveals His secret while intoxicated,
 His recompense along the Path would be the gallows.

O brother, it is not fitting for scholars to speak out everything they know. There are many things they know yet keep quiet about. "Speak to people according to their mental capacity" has become their guiding principle. If they were to speak out everything they know then there would be a tumult on account of an excess of what is good in itself, for the damage would outweigh the profit. If a babe at the breast is given bread and rich meat stew it will die. A physician prescribes medicine according to the intensity of the sickness. If he prescribes medicine in excess of the sickness then another sickness would result and another medicine would have to be prescribed. In this way a great deal of damage would be done.

If it were permissible to say or write everything the sheikhs would not have given hints and indications, nor would they have employed technical terms in their explanations. The purpose of doing all this is to say what can be fittingly said, but to keep concealed secrets which should not be divulged. They know that, if it were permissible to divulge everything there would be no letters used as abbreviations in the Quran. Thus some theologians say: "There is a profound secret between God and His beloved." In *Qut ul-Qulub* Imam Abu Talib Makki

has stated that "knowledge is of three kinds: knowledge of what is manifest; knowledge of what is interior; and knowledge between God and His servant." Knowledge of what is manifest should be shared with externalist scholars, whereas knowledge of what is interior should be shared with those who have an inner knowledge of man. The knowledge which exists between a servant and the Lord, however, should not be revealed to either group.

There is a secret between You and me to which none is privy:
Even if I lose my head, I'll not reveal Your secret to a soul.

If someone says: "Reveal the divine secret," it would be infidelity on his part, and "it is better to kill the person who speaks openly about divine oneness than allow him to live" becomes operative, for some have given this meaning:

If anyone reveals His secret while intoxicated,
His recompense along the Path would be the gallows.

O brother, there is a saying: "A seeker is a talker, but one who has found is dumb." Thus "they are deaf, dumb and blind" are the qualities of the mystics. The king of mystics³⁴⁷ had a vision. He saw a skull on which was written: "Deaf, dumb and blind." He said: "This was the head of a mystic."

He listens to no knowledge, so we seal our lips:
He does not value intellect, so we become mad.

Also:

As far as possible, be a stranger to your intellect:
Sally forth against your intellect: become a madman.

When this describes a person's state, what scope would there be for speaking? If it had been appropriate to speak there would have been no question of "our lips were sealed" or "we became mad." Night and day we would have spoken, using a hundred prepared allusions. Without a doubt they had gulped down oceans and been unable to breathe!

Men have drunk a thousand oceans and still gone thirsty:
How have you become intoxicated, without a single drop?

Also:

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
In their innermost hearts they strive to erase all trace of self.
They continually drink wine proffered by the Friend:
They play with their heads, yet hide the divine secret.

Moreover, as far as this group is concerned, anything which anyone says while overcome by some intoxicated state would be excessive. Such a person should be excused, for "lovers cannot be interrogated about what they have done." Whatever a lover does is done under compulsion, not from choice.

O brother, I have spent many years studying the books and writings of this group. As a result I have discovered that the consensus of the sheikhs of the Way and the scholars of the Law is that anyone who reaches a high station or attains an exalted rank, or is adorned with ordinary as well as mystical knowledge,

and has power and angelic realms revealed to him, should be a follower of the Law of the Messenger. He should not abandon his Law. If he does, he will fall into the wilderness of libertinism or that of transmigration, or perish in the expanse of pantheism, resulting in the destruction of his faith.

Whoever fails to find the Way within the Law of Muhammad
 Will not obtain his desire from this threshold, even if he tries forever.
 The wealth of the world and religion form His threshold:
 For the prophets, the direction of prayer is His pure house.
 Search for wealth there, and seek religion there:
 Seek there a rendezvous with those who have no doubts.

Some foolish people, with a hankering after union with the divine, without a perfect leader or a guide who was acquainted with the Way and knowledgeable about it, by means of their own shallow intellects and deceived by Satan, have entered this Way, have fallen in this bloodthirsty wilderness, have seen their faith destroyed and have perished therein. Khwaja Attar has given a hint about this:

A guide along the Way is as scarce as the philosopher's stone:
 His breast has become a heavenly pasture.
 The Way is long and full of calamities, O son:
 One who travels along the Way needs a guide.
 If you set out upon the Way without a guide,
 Even if you are very strong, you will fall into a well.
 How can a blind man walk straight?
 It is sinful for a blind man to walk without a staff.
 If you experience pain, a guide will appear:
 The key to unlock your pain will also appear.

O brother, although "There is no god but God" is reality, "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" is the Law. What would you say if someone repeats for a thousand years, "There is no god but God," but deliberately does not add, "and Muhammad is the Apostle of God," nor does he believe it? In no way would he be a Muslim and his faith correct. If he were, all Jews and Christians would be Muslims, for they say "There is no god but God," but don't say that "Muhammad is the Apostle of God." Just as any faith which does not profess that "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" would not be faith, so also there can be no religion of Islam without his Law. Hakim Sanai says:

Since you are sick with desire and lust,
 "The worlds' mercy" is your physician.³⁴⁸
 He is your proof: don't seek the Way:
 He is your tongue: don't say foolish things.
 No one approaches God unless the Chosen is his mount:
 No matter how much he may run, advance is none.
 Become his dust and you'll become a king:
 Belong to him, and do whatever you want!
 Whoever is not dust at his doorway
 Will be ashamed, even though he be an angel.

O brother, as long as knowledge and intellect remain, so too do the Law and its difficulties. Whoever denies this departs from the religion of Islam, according to the consensus of the religious scholars and sheikhs. If something higher than knowledge and intellect appears to a person and a refined state, which is called the knowledge of love, becomes manifest to him, then this is something bestowed, not acquired.

Their pain is not acquired but bestowed:
How could such pain possibly be acquired?

Intellect and injunction are meant for tasks, while love and faith are meant to be tasted. Thus it is said: "Love is a divine madness." What happens to an intelligent person would not happen to a person who is out of his senses; nor would unusual behaviour flow from a careful person, or cautious behaviour from someone who is madly in love. Such a person would be excused. He knows what transpires with Him in that world. Concerning this state an indication such as this is given:

For intelligent people the Law comes as a difficulty:
For enraptured hearts love is an honoured guest.
The pain of love comes as balm for every heart:
No difficulty was ever solved without love.
When the condition for union arrives,
The conversation of Delilah turns insipid.

Something took place between him and the Exalted, Glorious Lord. What happened remains a secret.

It is a secret between me and You to which none should be privy:
Even if I lose my head, I'll not divulge Your secret to a soul.

Yet for anyone else, who does not experience that pain or that state, to enter into this work and exaggeratedly claim, "I am a lover," or "I have experienced oneness," would mean he has abandoned the religion of Islam. God protect us from such a thing! First of all a person has to experience that pain and that state, and then that work. These lines contain a hint about this:

Unbelief for the unbeliever, religion for the devout:
Just a trace of Your pain for the heart of Attar.
A trace of God's pain in your heart,
Is better for you than acquiring both worlds.

Nowadays anybody at all makes extravagant statements: "Love is like this and those who have experienced oneness are like this." They have no notion of what love is, nor do they know what oneness is. O helpless one, this is not a work of extravagant claims, nor is it a matter of reading some portions of a book devoted to renunciation or the like. This is another knowledge, and this is another type of group.

All this knowledge about the body is trivial:
Knowledge of the Path to God is different.
Food which is offered to the proficient
Can scarcely be given to beginners.

Who gave this wealth to you and me, born luckless as we were of our mothers? You and I can only throw the dust of misfortune upon our heads and grieve over ourselves. Make your state conformable to mine and say:

O that my mother had never given birth to me
 Till my infidel soul had been killed!
 When I remove the foolishness of my age,
 Not one of the works I do comes forward.
 O Creator, if I have been a creature of habit
 Finally I have come to bear witness.
 If but a gentle breeze comes from You,
 Dancing I would offer up my life in Your lane.

This has been put briefly. Nevertheless it is hoped that those with aptitude, through careful consideration, might be strongly inclined thereto - God willing! I take refuge in God from what is faulted or base and proclaim: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God."

Letter 103

SIGHING, REPENTING AND OVERCOMING EVIL SUGGESTIONS

To Amin Khan. Peace be to you, O brother, and also the mercy and blessings of God! The contents of your brotherly letter are clear to me. O brother, here we are in the eighth century.³⁴⁹ Faith has become a rarity. Believers are as scarce as the philosopher's stone. You must have heard the saying: "Islam was a stranger at the beginning and also at the end." The age being referred to is ours. What should be done? We should throw the dust of our difficulties upon our heads and weep over ourselves. This is work for men, not for hermaphrodites. What will you ask now? How can we unfortunate ones experience the gift of that wealth? At this point those endowed with insight and travellers along the Way say:

I do not know for what I remain held captive in this life:
 I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

What should be said about you and me? O brother, the group which is engaged in this work has disappeared from our midst. Nowadays a handful of ignorant people remain in themselves and adorn themselves with their shape and form. They lay claim to knowledge and mystical experience. When you look into the matter, they don't even know what infidelity is, so what could you expect them to know about faith itself?

The world is full of sick people, but physicians have departed from us.

The secret has been expressed thus:

The company of good people has vanished from the world:
 A table laden with honey has become a wasps' nest.

A person associated with Khwaja Hasan Basri said: "Khwaja, what were the friends of the Messenger like?" He replied: "They were such that, if you had seen them, you would have said they were all out of their minds. Moreover, if they had seen you, they would have said that you were all devils." This very thing occurred in the time of Khwaja Hasan Basri, whose age was so close to that of the companions, so what can be expected of our own? Mercy be upon the soul of Khusrau who said:

People say: "Idol-worshipper, go and don a sacred-thread!"
Which vein in Khusrau's body is not a sacred thread?

Those who have shaved their heads and beards and donned a sacred thread have ended up in an idol-temple or in a tavern. Thus it is said:

On the tree of the eternity of both worlds
One passes from unbelief to being a Muslim.

They have come to see themselves and their gaze has fallen on the reality of unbelief and faith. They have seen that everything is opinion and a sacred thread, and that all is claim and talk, not Islam. Being a Muslim is quite something else! Muslims are birds of a different kind. This has been indicated thus:

A Sufi, a green-clad sheikh, a recluse of forty days,
All these you have become, but not yet a Muslim!

Ain ul-Quzat says that all the defects of young men spring from their lack of faith. Yet you are boasting that you are a believer! If you want to see the beauty of faith then seek a believer who will remove the thread of unbelief from around your neck. At that moment you will be able to see the beauty of faith and proclaim it to the world:

Anyone who has not seen You hasn't seen anything:
Anyone who has not found You hasn't found anything.

Now you know what we should do to those who turn back. As long as there is time you should grieve over yourself night and day and, time and again, you should throw the dust of grief upon your head, for neither wasting time nor lacking in hope is compatible with this work.

Along this Way, even if you can't succeed,
Use hand and foot and you will not lose.

If you do not have a manly faith at least you will have the faith of old women and hermaphrodites. What can be done? If the radiance of the sun has set, at least there might be a lamp. And if there isn't, then what am I or Pharaoh or Nimrod, and what is a Christian or a Jew?

Make an effort before you die, O worshipper of self,
That a modicum of sincere friendship may be yours.
If you acquire even a trace of such friendship,
A sun will laugh again within your heart.

O brother, today whoever can do so removes his faith from the world to safety. He is a real man and is the Khwaja Junaid or Shibli of our age. Otherwise everything is conjecture and superfluity, unless God wills otherwise. Mercy be upon the soul of the one who said:

When we consider the sorry state we are in,
How can we be fit to see the beauty of Your face?

The story is a long one, but the letter short. It is, of necessity, abridged.

Night passed, but my story was not over:
What could night do? My story was quite long.

O brother, tread the path of the sheikhs who are the leaders of the people, whether it concerns an apostolic tradition or something generally agreed on, i.e. what concerns external works, such as ritual purity, daily prayer or fasting, and those things which are connected to what is external. These should be observed according to the prescriptions of the Law. All are accomplished according to external prescriptions. This is because of the fear of falling into the clutches of evil suggestions. It is said that whoever falls into the clutches of evil suggestions falls into the deepest pit of hell, from which it is difficult to escape.

If you want a door to be opened before you,
And the One you seek to show His Face to you:
Remain with the Messenger, the seal of the ages,
Like a knocker on a door, fixed there forever.

It is related that the leader of the faithful, Umar, used the utensils of Jews to perform his ablutions, even though wine is lawful for them. Moreover these utensils were seldom empty inside their homes. Taking all that into account, externally it was still sufficient. He did not say that the utensils belonged to them and should not be used as they had contained wine.

Some of the companions of the Prophet used to go bare-footed and even go to pray in this fashion. They did not say that they were bare-footed and might have picked up something impure, so how could they perform their ritual prayer like that? This was because, externally, no impurity was involved and, externally, this was sufficient. Many examples and things similar to these are related about the companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors, as well as our ancestors and those who have recently preceded us. They are contained in several of these letters. They have tried very hard indeed to purify their hearts and cleanse them of all impurities and of whatever is blameworthy, for these act as a veil. For example, every day they die seventy times yet come back to life again. Thus it is that men with human features but devilish qualities call them mad, but they

themselves know who is in fact mad. O that the whole world were mad in this fashion!

Son, unless the work is put into practice,
How will you get news of what has happened?

A holy man was asked: "When did you come to know God?" He replied: "From the time people began to call me a madman."

As far as possible be a stranger to intellect:
Banish intellect, and become a madman.

O brother, imitate the sheikhs of the faith and watch out that you are not beguiled by evil suggestions. Otherwise you might fall into devilish clutches. If you do fall, however, quickly take hold of yourself, for the work has not slipped from your hands. Seek a remedy for it. When you wish to step onto a prayer-carpet then, before forming your intention to pray, recite the following prayer several times: "In the name of God and in God, and from God, and towards God, and upon God do believers put their trust."

From hour to hour, when you are tormented by evil suggestions, recite: "Say: 'I take refuge with the Lord of the Dawn'" (Q113,1),³⁵⁰ and also: "Say: 'I take refuge in the Lord of Mankind'" (Q114,1).³⁵¹ You should place your hand on your breast. Every time you perform the ritual ablutions, drink the remainder of the water at one gulp with the intention of being liberated from evil suggestions, whether you perform your ablutions ten or twenty times. Moreover you should not eat or drink without performing your ablutions. Show yourself assiduous in this, for there are many benefits and innumerable blessings in this practice. Perform two cycles of prayer twice in memory of this. Make this a religious duty for yourself. After night prayers and before voluntary prayers perform two cycles, and after each recital of the *Fatiha*,³⁵² recite, "Say: 'God is One'" (Q112,1)³⁵³ ten times. When you bestow peace say a hundred times, "O You who open." This prayer is called "The Prayer for Felicity in Both Worlds." Be confident that all affairs of religion and of the world will benefit from these two.

May what you desire be rendered easy for you – God willing!

Letter 104

HAVING CONFIDENCE IN DERVISHES

Addressed to Malik Mufarrih.

Even though Solomon had so many works in hand,
From earth to heavenly throne he seized and kept.
Once he recognized the value of poverty,
He earned his keep by weaving baskets.

Dear brother, Malik Mufarrih, so precious to me! "May God increase your good deeds and forgive your sins and faults!" Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, poor and insignificant Sharaf Maneri! Study them carefully. In a

word, no matter what your external dress may be, rest assured that you are, in faith and deed, with the poor. Even more, your heart is with the Prophet and his illustrious family.

O brother, it is known that the Apostle, in spite of so much glory and greatness, namely that "but for you, the world would not have been called into existence," nevertheless his prayer remained: "O God, cause me to live poorly, to die poorly, and raise me up among the poor."

The Lord lays the foundation of the world:
Although it is very high, He can destroy it.
Whatever you see is nothing more than conjecture:
Whatever you know is no more than an illusion.

O brother, poverty and indigence constitute one of the divine secrets. Don't you see that, on the Night of Ascent, the domain of sense and the angelic domain were revealed to the gaze of the Prophet. He did not even look at them out of the corner of his eye. He said: "Poverty is my boast!"

The messenger Adam was made to be worshipped by the angels. His gaze fell upon the secret of need and poverty. He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat and donned the garb of poverty.

When Adam's soul was inflamed by the secret of poverty,
He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.

The poverty of the messenger, Solomon, is famous. Praise be to God, those matters, virtues and sincerity are found in full or great measure in your person, O brother! You should give thanks for this. God willing, on the Day of Resurrection you will be found in the concourse of those poor ones. May the Glorious and Exalted God grant you firmness in these matters, and enable you to increase in them day by day. By His grace may you come to a good end! Peace!

Letter 105

ABSORPTION IN "THERE IS NO POWER OR STRENGTH EXCEPT IN GOD"

Believing in One God is not a task for dust and water:
It is found in a clean heart and a pure soul.
O you who pray to God out of habit,
Your witness to God is far from Reality.
As long as you worship God with your tongue,
This is nothing more than worshipping air!

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Dear friend, read what is written carefully. In a word, Qazi Zainuddin³⁵⁴ described your situation in full detail. Rest assured, dear friend, that this account has been received by me. Indeed I have to come and see you! When you don the cap of the sheikhs you should break the idol of custom; cut the thread of habit; and step out on the

Sufi Path in right earnestness. You should also be stout-hearted in your quest for God for, without steadfastness, a disciple will not arrive anywhere.

A mean-spirited dog seeks after bones:
 The paws of a lion seek living marrow.
 Every stout-hearted person becomes a man:
 Like the sun, he is unique in height.
 Whoever steps resolutely onto this Path,
 Even if he be a beggar, will become a king.

Dear friend, this is privileged knowledge granted to those acquainted with the Path. They are the scholars of the life to come. This knowledge is acquired by serving them and associating with them, not from worldly scholars, who deprive people of their faith. The following contains a hint about the matter:

All this knowledge is simply a collection of trivia:
 Knowledge of the Way to God is something else.
 The motive of this group is quite exalted:
 Whatever they say must be correct.
 Any desire which is for more than this
 Would be custom and habit, not religion.

Whoever has the courage to advance from habit and worshipping one's own desires and attain the worship of God should seek the wealth of associating with this group, for they are the scholars of the Last Things. "The scholars of my community are like the prophets of the Children of Israel" is their title. Day by day, under their gaze and in their service, reprehensible qualities are to be changed into praiseworthy ones. As a result of the blessing of their association and instruction may you find release from the clutches of your infidel soul, see the beauty of Islam, and attain untrammeled belief in One God. May you gain admission to the Lord of Oneness, "With Whom none is associated," and become a genuine believer in One God.

When your bad habits were changed,
 Every knotty problem you had was solved.
 When you no longer exist you will seek Reality:
 Every cry that then arises will be: "I am Reality!"
 For all upon whom this Sun shines here,
 What is promised there, is already found here.
 Here is the Goal of the Path:
 This is the finest aspect of reality.
 May we and all Muslims come to a good end! Peace!

Letter 106

HIGH RESOLVE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Strive to become something from nothing,
 And become intoxicated on divine wine.
 Do away with whatever pertains to the Way or thinking,

So that your heart may become the house of God.

"On the Day of Resurrection men will be grieving over their intentions." O brother, take a look within yourself today to see what you find there. If your inner life is dominated by loving and seeking God, tomorrow you will assuredly be raised with the concourse of lovers. If you find that loving and seeking paradise predominate, you will be raised up with men of probity. If you find that loving and seeking this world predominate, you will be raised up with the worldly minded.

Whatever captures your attention in this world

Will define, for eternity, your measure of union.

O brother, those who came with high resolve swept this world and the next from their path and said: "Whatever smacks of the world is spurned by real men. It lies in the grasp of Nimrod and Pharaoh. It is essential to abandon it."

Whoever has been purified of the abode of the world

Has become a radiant light, even though he be dust.

Whatever has been fashioned in paradise, every pleasure and benefit, pertains to the senses and cannot be separated from what is eaten, heard, seen, worn or smelt. For an astonished person there can be 'association' in all of this. To descend to what might involve association would, for an astonished person, flow from meanness, not from steadfast resolve. How excellent is this steadfast resolve! What a secret lies within this dust!

A mean-spirited dog looks for bones:

A lion's paw seeks living marrow.

Flies and cats are drawn to table food:

Dogs and crows go in search of bones.

This is high resolve! It is said; "Paradise is a prison for mystics, just as the world is a prison for believers."

O brother, if there were no promise of vision in paradise, the very description of paradise would not have flowed from their tongues! It is said that, if mention of the world was found on the tongue of the king of mystics, he would perform the minor ablution.³⁸⁵ If he mentioned paradise, he would perform the major ablution.³⁸⁶ People asked him for an explanation. He replied: "The world is something new. Describing it would be 'innovation' according to the imperative of the mystical state. Innovation requires the performance of the minor ablution. Paradise is a place to indulge one's desires. Describing it would be a pollution." The mystical endeavour demands manly speech, not stories of hermaphrodites. Here nobody should commit any excess. A person wounded by a sword while himself wielding one is different from someone who goes from feast to feast and devours bread and meat. How can everyone be the same? How can beggars be the same as kings? Beware of those who weigh lovers and manly people on the scale of their narrow intellects, for they are greater than those who can weigh them on the scale of their intellects. There is no work left for the star of intellect when the sun of love shines. For us, in these states, there can be nothing more than believing and confirming.

The food given to those pure ones

Cannot be given to beginners.

All of this knowledge is a constricted body:
 Knowing how to travel towards God is something else.
 A letter, which makes blackens a piece of paper,
 Is quite incapable of lighting up a heavy heart.
 If you have pain, a guide will appear:
 A key to the lock of your pain will appear.

Everything else is mad desire and of absolutely no consequence. Peace!

Letter 107

GRIEVING OVER ONE'S PAST LIFE AND REPENTING OVER A PAST STATE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Mercy be upon the soul of the dear friend who said:

Alas, my whole life has passed in the alley of idols!
 Like an old Brahmin I remained in a temple.

O brother, a person who was caught up in his own grief and affliction was in such a bad and contemptible state that the unfortunate fellow said:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
 I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

What else could he recall or what could he say or write to anyone? O brother, you have spoken about your sorrow. In a similar fashion, a number of dear friends here also experience such sorrow. You are not alone.

O brother, the days are slipping by and death is approaching.³⁵⁷ The last journey awaits me. Its fear and uncertainty have taken hold of me. "When will the Angel of Death arrive?" He inquires: "My God, shall I lay hold of the soul of this servant for happiness or for punishment? I don't know." At that moment, what will the answer be? He will hear: "How could anyone who is disturbed about this be at peace with himself?"

I don't know what has been written about you of old:
 I don't know what your end will be like.
 What is bad in me became good when You accepted it:
 What is good in me became bad when You took it away.

O brother, this work is extremely difficult indeed. It is not what one and all imagine it to be, or what they pass their time in saying or hearing about it. A mystic was seized by the pangs of death. People said to him: "What would you like us to bring you?" He replied: "Nothingness, for it has no existence." The wealth of this can be expressed thus: "If the faith of Abu Bakr be weighed against the faith of my community, it would be greater." He kept on saying: "O that I had been leaves on a tree that sheep might graze on me!" He whose station is, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate," used to say: "O that I had been my mother's menstrual flow!" This is an indication of the state of those who are the leaders of the world and princes of the Islamic faith.

What can a person say who has been born in a temple, brought up in a temple and passed his entire life prostrating in front of an idol?³⁵⁸ Mercy be upon the unfortunate one who said:

Our foreheads have become callused from prostrating before idols:
Some of us have been charged with the faith of Islam.

Also:

O Brahmin, allow me in, for you have overturned my Islam:
Or can a renegade like me find admission before an idol?

All of this has been written about my own state. It is not an explanation.³⁵⁹
Peace!

Letter 108

CHANGING A BLAMEWORTHY DISPOSITION INTO A LAUDABLE ONE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Bum and plunder everything except God:
Keep yourself untouched by anything except religion.

O brother, paradise and hell contain many doors. All acceptable words, actions and praiseworthy behaviour are doors leading to paradise, while all unacceptable words, actions and reprehensible behaviour are doors leading to hell. This is because all repose and comfort which comes to man does so on account of acceptable words, actions and praiseworthy behaviour, while all unhappiness which afflicts man is on account of unacceptable words, actions and reprehensible behaviour. Whoever emerges today from bad words, actions and behaviour and is adorned with acceptable words, actions and praiseworthy behaviour, has escaped from hell and reached paradise. This is because hell is connected with bad words, actions and behaviour, not with good words, actions and praiseworthy behaviour.

If you always act in a praiseworthy manner,
You will escape the fire consuming evil habits.
As long as your qualities are joined to you,
You will be like a candle that does not light.

O brother, the very first task of disciples today is to change bad words into good ones, and bad actions into good ones, and bad behaviour into good behaviour. Among the Sufis this is called "transforming one's own nature."

You remain veiled from yourself to such an extent
That you will forever remain deficient in yourself.
The purity of mind in which the dervishes advance
Makes them progress, at every breath, in self-forgetfulness.

This work is, for a disciple, the stage of the minor ablution before ritual prayer. Just as there can be no prayer without this ablution, in a similar fashion the disciple cannot possibly make progress along the Path without this transformation. All struggles and ascetical practices are for the sake of this

transformation so that a disciple might become fit and prepared to tread the Path. Anyone who wants to tread this Path without this transformation can be compared to a person who wants to pray without first performing the minor ablution. Every defect in this work today can be attributed to the desire to do this work without paying attention to its preconditions, like wanting to pray without performing the ablutions. Every work has its preconditions. Until they are attended to, the work cannot be accomplished. There can be no seeing without eyes, no hearing without ears, no speaking without a tongue. Similarly, unless there has been a transformation, this work is simply impossible. Thus it is that an experienced guide should be a person who has experienced the ups and downs of this work; has emerged from the grip of his selfish soul; has been liberated from seeking his own pleasure and portion; and is well aware of what this work involves. The way for a disciple to acquire this transformation is in the shadow of the spiritual riches of his guide and through humbly serving him.

Son, the Way is long and full of hardships:
 The traveller along this road needs a guide.
 How can a blind man possibly walk straight?
 It is sinful for a blind man to walk without a staff.
 If you experience the pain, a guide will appear:
 A key will appear to assuage your pain.

All this would become a divine command as an imperative of the mystical state for anyone who experiences this pain, and whose breast is gripped by this grief and sorrow, and who wants to emerge from harmful bad habits and push himself towards human perfection and become, in appearance and reality, a man. He should enter into the humble service of someone who has attained perfection so that he might show him also the Path to perfection; arrange matters for him; and lead him safely through the difficulties and dangers of this Path.

He is your guide, so don't you seek the Way:
 He is your tongue, so don't speak foolishly.
 Consider whatever he says a profound mystery:
 Consider whatever he does a deed divine.
 Become his dust, and play the king:
 Become his, and do whatever you wish.

At this stage, moreover, you should know at least who is called perfect and actually is perfect. O brother, a person is called perfect who has four things: the Law in full; the Way in full; reality in full; and mystical knowledge in full. Whoever possesses these four things is a person to be imitated. He would be a spiritual guide, and would be perfect. Such a person is fit to give guidance. Apart from this it is all error and ignorance, as happens nowadays. Peace!

Letter 109

THE BEST, FINEST, CHOICEST ASPECT AND FRIENDSHIP OF MAN: A SUMMARY

O brother, man is the choicest portion of all that exists and the best of creatures. Whatever creation has, man has. All other things are drawings on the wall. Khwaja Attar has written some lines in this vein:

When the angels prostrated before Adam,
A trace of love came into existence within them.
When they found the Way to God within Adam's soul,
They hastened to offer him service without end.
Until the soul of Adam became aware,
They did not know the Way to the Creator.
The Way appeared along with Adam:
In him appeared the key to both worlds.

O brother, don't be inattentive! In eighteen thousand worlds you will not find what is within dust and water. Notice that man came to birth in "And I have breathed into him of My spirit" (Q15:29).

O heart, beware of your own desires:
Move through the alleys of His friends.
Pass beyond health and disposition:
Enter the secret of "and I have breathed" and look.

The angels had the rank of holiness and purity, "but they are honoured servants" (Q21:26); whereas "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54) was fitting for dust and water. Thus you can realize that whatever can be owned is possessed by dust and water.

When dust became involved with his purity,
The divine throne fell in the dust before Adam.

"God created Adam according to His own image" sums it up.

Imam Ghazali says: "Man's exalted quality stems from this saying: 'The reality of man is that he manifests the secrets of the divine essence.'"

There is no other creature above you:
There is no beloved other than you.
Since you are beyond ordinary and mystical knowledge,
You are not encompassed by explanation or quality.
Whatever has been encompassed by belief in One God
Has all come within you, seeker of Reality.

O brother, when He had laid hold of dust with the perfection of His strength then, for forty years, he caught sight of the light in the sun. When the inner springs of being flowed from Him, at that moment He commanded the angels thus: "Go to the threshold of this astonishing figure, poor in appearance, the threshold of His glory, who is beyond the seven heavens. Kiss it! "Fall down, prostrating

yourselves before him!" (Q15:29) That degree, stage, station and rank was not for mud but for the ruler of hearts, the most refined of God's creatures; one of the King's secrets; and one of the hidden meanings for veiling the secret. "Say: 'The Spirit is by my Lord's command'" (Q17:85) was placed in the core of Adam's heart and on the purified tongue of the lord of the world.³⁶⁰ That secret remained secure.

This sign was again given: "He created Adam according to His image," not by way of allegory or metaphor. "This is a great secret." When the members of the heavenly court saw that greatness and that rank they bestrewed their souls at the threshold of that pure dust. When the accursed one,³⁶¹ who was the bat of the age, was in conflict with the sun, the victory of Adam occurred. He then rubbed his eyes vigorously and, in extreme misery, did not see even a particle of that wealth.

My luck is such that chance holds sway:
If love is my portion, separation comes my way.

Adam's nature was the receptacle of hidden mysteries, otherwise how could a handful of dust exhibit such worthiness that those who dwell in holy seclusion, and are preachers from the pulpits of intimacy, should prostrate themselves before him? How could a handful of clay, unless accepted, be so honoured that trustworthy Gabriel, high-stationed Michael and respected Israfil should be told: "Prostrate before him!" That handful of clay was a box containing the secret of the heart. O brother, all the wise men of the world stood dumbfounded. "What's this? He loves this handful of dust!" At this stage a dear friend says: "What would you say about God Who loves no one but Himself? Whoever loves His own creation is certainly loving Himself."

This verse was recited in the presence of Sheikh Abu Sa'id: "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54). He said: "God loves them and He thus loves nothing but Himself." O dervish, since nothing else really exists, how can you say that He loves another? It is related that the teacher of Abul Qasim Tustari used to say: "It is fitting that you exist, yet He is existence; that you are a being, yet He is being." Khwaja Attar has this to say:

I do not know whether I am anything or not:
Ultimately everything is His, so what am I?

An existing being whose boundaries open out to nothingness, such an existing being – if you can call it existing – is but a figure of speech. Existing "between one nothingness and another" is scarcely existing! Peace!

Letter 110

THE WAY OF THE LAW, OF THE SUFI PATH, AND OF REALITY

Realize that the Law is a way, the Sufi Path is a way, and Reality is a way. The way of the Law has to be trodden. External cleansing is obtained through it and a person becomes well-behaved and religious-minded. The way of the Sufi Path has also to be trodden for inner purification until a person's interior becomes purified and prepared to receive the Hidden One. A person slights himself and chooses God as his friend. In no state at all does he draw attention to himself, nor does he explain himself. Apart from persevering remembrance, that work does not show its face. Peace be on the one who said: "There is a polish for everything. The heart's polish is the remembrance of God." When the heart is scrubbed clean of rust the first thing that appears in the mirror is the face of the polisher. If the remembrance of God is the polisher, then the remembrance of God appears; but if the Remembered One is the polisher, then the Remembered One appears. "This is a great mystery."

Remembering with the tongue makes the heart present to the Remembered One. Remembering in the heart makes one's spirit present to the Remembered One. Remembering in one's spirit makes the mystery present to the Remembered One. The mystery, in the Presence, says 'I' and, in concealment, says 'He.'

The person who loves his Friend looks Him in the eye:
Finding out or concealing should have no place in love.
At the stage of Presence one says 'I':
When scattered and hidden one says 'He'.

The way of Reality has to be trodden to get rid of all additions in order that "unity of essence" may be attained, just as Husain Mansur³⁶² said: "Being a Sufi means 'unity of essence.'" Unity of essence cannot be attained except by the falling away of all additions. As long as anything is added to you, or anything is added by you, you will make no progress along the way of Reality.

At this stage – referred to as that of "those who throw away their heads" – calamities of themselves befall a person. People tie a sacred thread around themselves and say:

I said: "If only I could be the confidant of secrets!"
I came to the royal court with the wealth of union.
How could I know about "With the perfection of His essence?"
I have entered a temple and am worthy of a sacred thread.

Letter III

SIGHING AND REPENTING OVER ONE'S STATE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Because of this infidel placed within us,
The number of Muslims in the world has decreased.

O brother, don't give up mourning over your afflictions, and don't feel secure in that Islam of yours, for an unbeliever or polytheist would feel ashamed of your Islam and mine, while Jews and Christians would have a hundred reproaches concerning your religion and mine.

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

It is related that a Jew was living as a neighbour of the king of mystics. Someone said to him: "It is astonishing to see that you remain a Jew, even though you are the neighbour of the king of mystics." He replied: "Well, I could not practise his Islam, and I have a thousand reproaches for your Islam, for it is shameful."

O Brahmin, you have erased my Islam, so let me in!
Or is there no place for a lost one like me, even before an idol?

If one day you were to catch sight of the idol-temple of your selfish soul you would see a hundred idols and sacred threads in each corner. You would say what that dear friend said:

My forehead is worn from prostrating before idols:
I have doubts about my own Islamic faith.

Today everyone has mistaken his own desires for God. A person worships them and claims that he is worshipping God. Alas! Where is this from?

Alas, don't say "I am a worshipper of God:"
You are worshipping your own desires!

Say rather what that mystic has said:
I am an idol-worshipper, an idol-worshipper:
I speak correctly when I say "That is what I am."

"The selfish soul is the great idol." When we submit to this idol you could say we are all idol-worshippers yet, out of ignorance, we have called it 'Islam.'

If you are intoxicated today tomorrow you will feel the effects.

When a person, at death's door, emerges from this intoxication, he will know whether he is worshipping God or the idol of his selfish soul. Glory be to God! What sort of Islam is this? It is neither at rights with men nor with God Most Exalted, nor with the masters of intimate prayer or with those who frequent taverns. This is a distraction, not the faith of Islam! This was the reason for lamenting thus:

We are not ascetics if we sit in the treasury of deep prayer,
Nor are we serious, for we continue visiting taverns.

We are neither givers of advice nor tavern drunkards,
Neither here nor there, knowing where we belong or where we are.

O brother, we are all worshippers of self. We have not emerged from being worshippers of self to become worshippers of God. We should leave the mosque and head for an idol-temple, and we should say what one guide said:

Alas, my whole life has passed in a lane of idols,
Sitting like an old Brahmin in an idol-temple.

Reciting the Quran fully or holding it in one's hands ought to accompany belief in One God. Of what profit is the thread of pride to you or me?

A Quran in the hand, unbelief concealed in the heart,
An idle, intoxicated hypocrite lies sleeping on his bed.

Become a Muslim, O heart, and break the thread!

O brother, your selfish soul and mine are as full of claims as was accursed Pharaoh, but he spoke out openly, saying "I am your supreme lord!" Your selfish soul, as well as mine, says in secret, "I am your supreme lord!" It is afraid of being killed, whereas that accursed one did not experience this fear. This is why a certain guide left a mosque and headed towards an idol-temple saying:

Once again my guide took the path of a *Qalandar*³⁶³
He gave his cloak for a thread, and started off again.
He filled the tavern but emptied mosque and pulpit:
He went beyond the worship of fire and cross.
Quran and prayer-carpet he wagered for wine:
He gave his rosary to a wine-seller and took his wine and cups.
He rent the collar of his heart like a hero of the Way
And, struggling drunkenly along, he grabbed his beloved's skirt.

O brother, you should be alert and grieve over your life as long as the door of repentance is not closed. A dear friend has put it thus:

O you old sinner, the door of repentance lies open:
Many blessings have been prepared and stored up for you.
Hurry towards repentance as to the mother of the world:
When a person does good, many things happen.
Keep on raining sword blows upon your unruly soul:
Remove whatever obstruction lies across your path.

O brother, don't be heedless! As long as breath remains, so too do idols, sacred threads and a hundred thousand evils.

O that my mother had not given birth to me
Until my selfish soul had been killed!
O that there had been no name for me
Until there was no work or rest for me!

Letter 112

ENJOINING THE COMMANDS OF GOD AND REMAINING FAR FROM ONE'S OWN PREFERENCE OR THAT OF PEOPLE

Dearest brother, Malik Mahmud, dear to God in both worlds, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines! Read them carefully. Rest assured, my brother, that your letters are reaching me regularly. People coming here also tell me how you are. God willing, if it has been so decreed and the Lord wishes it, we shall meet. The pain of separation will be changed into the joy of meeting!

You know the delight of seeing a long-lost friend:
It is like a cloud giving rain to thirsty people in a desert.

No work, however, is completed according to the wish of a slave. Prophets, saints, nobles and kings want so many things to happen, but they don't. They also wish that so many things might not happen, yet they do. What the Lord wants overrides all other wishes.

No work goes the way I want it to:
Yes, this is what it means to be a slave.

What business does a slave have with wanting? Slavery is one thing, lordship is something else. Just as there is no room for duality in oneness, so too there is no room for anything else in the Divine Nature. It is said: "Either you or Me." You can want something and so can I, but what eventuates is what He wants. Thus it is that holy people, in all their promises and undertakings, say "God willing," entrusting them to the will of the Lord and disappearing themselves from the scene so as not to be struck by jealousy.

At the beginning of any work, O brother, don't say "I'll do this" or "I'll give this" and suchlike things without saying "God willing" at the end, so that you don't get puffed up on account of your work. When the unbelievers of Mecca asked the Messenger about the spirit he said to them: "I'll give you the answer to this question in the morning." He forgot to add, "God willing." For seventeen or eighteen days there was an interruption in the customary revelation upon the Apostle and his companions. If the mountains were similarly deprived they would have been reduced to nothing. When Gabriel arrived he said to him: "My brother, the contending parties are present and are awaiting a reply. They have had to wait many days. What has happened?" He replied: "When you said to them, 'I'll give you the answer to this question in the morning,' you did not add, 'God willing.'"

O brother, if the decree has been issued it will assuredly be fulfilled. And if it has not been issued, then even if you or I wish it a hundred times, there is no way it will come to pass. O brother, the Messenger called people to the faith for a period of twenty-three years. All these years the desire of the Messenger was that Abu Talib should embrace the faith. He did not do so. Thus you may know that nothing happens simply because a slave desires it. Nevertheless, lifeless desires of slaves, if they are inspired by God, come to complete fruition and cry out in this fashion:

The world advanced full of tumult and shouting:
 Everything was broken like a vessel.
 O world and soul, all are astonished at You:
 A hundred thousand intellects are awhirl over You.

Letter 113

STIMULATING DESIRE FOR POVERTY AND WANT: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

If the selfish soul humbly seeks alms
 In reality it acts like an emperor.

Dearest brother Khwajagi,³⁶⁴ prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines! Read them attentively. Your letters, my brother, are reaching me regularly. They have been read carefully. It is necessary, with regard to yourself, to march straight ahead in poverty and want so that, in the next world, you may not remain bereft of a portion of the wealth of the poor and needy of this world. When all the wealthy of the world, and all worldly people, behold the wealth and blessings of the poor and needy, they will desire them and say: "O that we had passed our days in the world begging!"

Even though Solomon held sway far and wide,
 From earth to throne it was all taking and keeping.
 When he recognized the value of poverty
 He earned his food by weaving baskets.

O brother, being poor and indigent is complete comfort, for it is secure from the trials of the world and the calamities of worldly people. Moreover the great hardship in the work of a dervish is that poverty befalls him. The night poverty overcomes him is the very night in which he will experience his ascension.

Whoever has been purified of the abode of the world
 Becomes unfettered light, even though he be dust.

O brother, dominion and power, and whatever was within the Apostle's sight, was placed to one side on the night of ascent. He didn't see a thing! He said: "Poverty is my boast." What magnanimity!

In truth you cannot draw the bow!
 Son, the revolving heavens form My bow.

When Adam was made the object of the prostration of the angels and the eight heavens were assigned to him, his glance fell upon the secret of poverty and want. He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat and donned the robe of a dervish.

When Adam's soul was inflamed by the secret of poverty
 He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.
 For me there was no great punishment
 When I lived in a quiet dwelling-place.

If what was bestowed upon Nimrod and Pharaoh is not given to you today, this does not mean that you don't deserve it, but that He is taking care of you so that you are not defiled as they were. Thus it is realized that liberation from the calamity of the world, O brother, is not found except in contentment.

Whoever has set out manfully on the path of contentment
 Has a heart left cold by the possession of the world.
 In the world there is no one with piety and depth:
 There is no possession greater than contentment.

Letter 114

EXALTING THE ONE WHOM GOD HAS BLESSED

A little of the pain of God in your heart
 Is better for you than acquiring both worlds.

My son, Husamuddin, after prayerful study realize that either the joy of finding, or the pain and grief of not finding, should be in your heart. Every heart which is empty of either is stamped with "There is no goodness in him," and also: "Your hearts became as hard as rock, or even harder" (Q2:72). In every work he undertakes, and in every state he experiences, a servant should be resolutely free of this world or the next, even if he is utterly bereft of external deeds or works, for here work depends on grace, not on what a person does. In other words, what anybody does is not the cause, but the grace received from God. Some have expressed it thus: "Grace is bestowed on the one favoured by God, not according to works or his origin." If grace depended on work, previous communities would have been more favoured than this one, for, since they are older, undoubtedly they would have done more. Yet the very opposite is true. Similarly, if grace depended on one's origin, then Satan would have been preferred to Adam, for Adam was made from blackish dust, but Satan from luminous flame. Yet the very opposite is true.

The one who admits His friend into His very own world
 Does so apart from his work, no matter what he does.

In view of all this – namely, that there is no cause – neither work nor effort is of any help "in finding out what service means and verifying what is correct." High resolve, however, is special to man, and thus a holy man has said: "The Lord has placed in the hands of men a bow which neither Gabriel nor Michael could draw." This bow is steadfast resolve.

In truth you cannot draw the bow!
 Son, the revolving heavens form My bow.

This is because He did not say to anyone from the 18,000 worlds: "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54). He said this to men. In addition, He did not promise the vision of Himself to anyone except to men.

What are sky, throne and elements? A fragrance!
 God's dust is a precious marrow for all.
 When dust does its work in purity,
 The throne falls in the dust before Adam.

Letters 115

THE ROLE OF INTELLECT AND OF LOVE

Oppression and justice, good and obscene, unbelief and belief
 Undoubtedly arise from the world of intellect.
 If you disturb the world of intellect,
 Your empty hand will receive a particle of love.

By signs and hints these couplets should indicate the difference between the role of intellect and that of love. In this way you should realize that the role of intellect is to work in one way, while that of love is to function in a different way. "Love is a divine madness." What happens to an intelligent man does not happen to a madman. This is quite clear and is hinted at thus:

This is a gathering of lovers, O jurist, so don't trouble them:
 How can you expect prayers to be offered in a city of idol-worshippers?

Undoubtedly a lover is without a heart, and a body without a heart does not speak. This is certain. In the commentary of Imam Zahidi this matter is clear. All the verses and writings which have come to each person in this section have emerged from this fact.

For the intelligent, the Law comes as a difficulty:
 For those without hearts, love comes to enoble.
 If there is love today, what will there be tomorrow?
 If unbelief and faith abound here, what will be there?

Undoubtedly, since "love is a divine madness" this happens. Where is it from, and where are commands about difficulties? "There is no tax on what is ruined" is a famous example. O brother, it is known that difficulties take a hold on the working of the intellect, but love works in a higher manner than the intellect does. This is the opinion of the person who said:

What do those without hearts have to do with gold and women?
 What do Law and intellect have to do with me?

Tomorrow, when people come out of hell, the fire of hell will have made them pure. When they afterwards go to paradise they will have nothing to suffer. Since the fire of hell will have burnt away all stains from their love³⁶⁵ they will be purified and enter the special paradise where there is no houri or defect. Just as there is no mention of any difficulty in the general paradise, neither is there any mention of any in the special paradise. This is the meaning of these couplets:

O intellect, you have produced your best:
 In the next world no one will buy your deceits.

As long as intellect has any influence over you,
 Depart from me, for I am where the struggle is.
 In the world of intellect your feet are bound:
 By exalting the pen you become its worshipper.
 If you are not a child and you do a man's work,
 What business do you have with pen and tablet?

Also:

This wealth of being 'heart-less' is not given to every heart:
 This abundance is not given to those asleep at home.
 Of what is given to those without intellect in the world of love,
 Not a drop is given to a hundred thousand intelligent ones.

All these matters form the subject-matter of a tradition in which it is related that the Apostle said: "God will not punish lovers, no matter what they do." They will not be caught for anything they do, for a lover is without a heart, and also without choice. What he does comes into existence without his intending it, and proceeds without his choosing.

The work of a lover involves compulsion:
 It results from an abundance of friendship.
 Undoubtedly, even if a madman is at fault,
 Whatever he says flows from freedom.
 Whatever is done by one who is mad
 Is swiftly pardoned, for he is mad.

Glory be to God! "Love is a divine madness" is, in this context, a saying to cling to.

There can be no blame for a lover:
 Not for him to burn on Judgement Day!
 If you become mature in the station of love,
 You will be free of everlasting punishment.

All that has been described is according to knowledge, and all is spoken in knowledge. No principle is found to be defective, nor is there any defect in what is derived from it. Moreover here, since this meaning is subtle and its outward appearance is denied, it is hidden from the externalists and revealed to men of heart and insight, for they have another taste and understanding.

Men of heart have another taste and understanding
 Which is greater than the understanding of both worlds.
 As long as that understanding arises like revelation,
 Whatever he says will be spoken correctly.
 Everyone who is moved to act by that understanding
 Is himself thrown into an ocean of mysteries.

If a handful of unbelievers of the age don't understand these people, what loss is it?

If an ant doesn't gather sugar, say: "Don't gather!"
 If a blind man doesn't see a gem, say: "Don't look!"

This letter should not be shown indiscriminately to people, lest it be stained by the immaturity of some. Peace!

Letter 116

SEEKING THE LOVER AND NEARNESS TO THE BELOVED

You are thirsty, yet separated from the Ocean:
You are begging, yet you sit atop a Treasure.

My son, Husamuddin, prayerful greetings! Read this and never be remiss in seeking and discussing. No matter what state you may be in, or what work you may be doing, or where you may be, realize that "He is with you wherever you may be" (Q57:4). Mystics who experience this merely glance at the pleasure of a hundred thousand paradises. Also, "We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (Q50:16). No matter what the intellect can give shape to or imagine, or can think about and understand, the essence and qualities of the Lord of the worlds are free thereof and totally holy. He is the Creator of everything! Nevertheless, He is nearer to you than your life-bearing jugular vein! The person who composed the following lines hints at this:

O you who die while opening the knot of seeking:
You were born in union yet die in separation.
You lie in the dust at the edge of the Ocean:
You sit atop a Treasure, yet die a beggar.

My son, the work is not something distant. The heavenly domain is with you, and the Lord of the heavenly domain is also with you. Procure for yourself that eye which will enable you to see unqualified Beauty, and that ear which will enable you to hear Speech without words or noise. Mercy be upon the person who said:

The world is full of sunshine, but eyes are blind:
The world is full of news, but ears are deaf.

Since you are occupied in this work, may you one day have the good fortune of arriving where others have arrived and see what they have seen! You will also say exactly what they have said.

The Beloved was face to face, and I knew it not:
He was intimately close to me, and I knew it not.
I said: 'Seek' – but I had already arrived!
I myself was scattering, and I knew it not.

Unfortunately nowadays everyone, by retiring behind the curtain of their own being, remains veiled. If this were not so, then the Desired and Sought After by all would be visible and attained, as it has been said:

What you have lost, you have distorted:
It is within you, but you yourself are the curtain.

Ears cannot bear more than this. Pass on, so that we may do so too. You must have heard:

If, intoxicated, someone reveals the secret of His love,
Death would be his recompense along the Sufi Path.

Thus concealment is necessary, except for intimations, hints and brief expressions.

Do you know why the pure ones are quiet?
 They try to erase all trace of self from their innermost hearts.
 At every breath they drink wine from the hand of the Friend:
 They play with their lives, but conceal the divine secret.

Letter 117

PREPARING FOR DEATH AND THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

The Way is long, my son, so be alert:
 Consign sleep to the grave and remain awake.
 Walk straight; strive your hardest; remain alert:
 Bear the burden; tackle difficulties; be a striver.

O brother, this world is where a servant labours and acquires merit. Whatever he carries off as his life's wealth is taken from here.

Comfort and effort are taken from here:
 Hell and paradise are taken from here.

Take a look today at your state and work, because whatever you have or whatever you do will be taken with you and will remain with you forever.

Whatever preoccupies your mind in this world
 Will be, for ever, that to which you are united.

Do not be negligent, for the work is extremely arduous. The Way is steep and sharply sloping. Satan and one's selfish soul lie in wait, as well as death, the grave and the last things. Hearing about these, poisons turn to water and livers are roasted. Faced with this pain an unfortunate one lamented thus:

O that my mother had never given birth to me!
 For she did not kill my infidel soul.
 O that my name had never existed!
 Thus my rest would not have been disturbed.

You should have a thousand regrets for passing your time in heedlessness, for living out your life, yet allowing the work to remain incomplete as the final journey looms into view. If, during the rest of your life, nothing was done, you should at least this once grieve over this.

Since I have passed my days in heedlessness
 Nothing I have done has turned out successful.
 Where shall I obtain balm for this pain?
 Life is over: where shall I go to grieve?

At the end of the night sinners and evil-doers, from the pain in their hearts and with copious tears, pray thus in their helplessness:

O Source of fidelity, don't display cruelty towards me!
 O Source of all gifts, don't lay hold of me for my sins!
 Even if no one else seeks pardon from You,
 I seek pardon for my sins: I need Your forgiveness.
 When the blanket covering me has turned black,
 Turn it white, like my hair, O Benevolent One!
 Don't turn me away from Your door bereft of hope!
 In Your gracious bounty, turn my blackness white!

Letter 118

PENURY: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Life slips away in five or six days:
 Whether happily or not, it still slips away.

Dear friend, your letter has arrived safely. I have read carefully what you have written about the tribulations of the times and the events of the age. O brother, "the world is the abode of calamity and strife." Is there anyone in it who has escaped from calamity and strife? This is impossible! Glory be to God! If our father, although crowned with vicegerency and being the recipient of angelic prostration, countless robes of honour and signs of favour, did not remain free from calamity and distress in a station such as paradise, and fell from the blessing and comfort of paradise into the sorrow and toil of this world, then how could his children, with so much defilement and with their infidel souls, remain safe in the abode of the world, the house of calamity? This is impossible. O brother, peace is in nothingness, not in existence. When existence came, peace disappeared.

O that Iraqi did not exist!
 All troubles stem from you.

A dervish, who was a mystic, was suffering the pangs of death. He was asked if there was anything he wanted to be brought to him. He replied: "Yes, nothingness, for it has no existence."

O that my name did not exist,
 And I felt no distress or rest!

A person fell sick. A dear friend asked about the cause of his sickness. He replied, "Existence!" O brother, for a man what other cause could there be except existence? A holy man has said: "If I were to speak about the quality of joy and the comfort of the world of nothingness, I would not be able to speak of one part in a hundred thousand. And if I were to speak about the quality of unhappiness and the grief of the world of existence, I would not be able to speak of one part in a hundred thousand."

O brother, when the King of Prophets – peace be upon him – was crowned with impeccability and honoured with the robe of "Apart from you, for what have I created the heavens," he said: "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad!" What then will an unfortunate one like himself say? From this it can

be understood what the condition and hardship of the descendants of Adam must be like in the world. Glory be to God! What will an animal, which consumes blood in the womb of its mother, consume when it comes forth? What today is called food and water is, if you examine the matter carefully, all blood.

So many things can be written. Lives reach their completion; volumes are turned black with writing; yet this story does not reach its end. In spite of all this, when Adam's children are confronted with the last things you will see that, in comparison to that, all this is but a drop in the Enveloping Ocean. Why shouldn't the Apostle say: "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad," for he was experiencing the grief of all,³⁶⁶ while you and I are preoccupied with our own grief. This story is very long. It has been summed up thus:

Evening passed, yet news of Me had not reached its limit:
What capacity does evening have? My story is quite long.

O Assistance of those who complain,
Help us, O Giver of aid!

Letter 119

STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH

My son, Qutbuddin,³⁶⁷ may God befriend you in both abodes! Having read your letter, accept prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! You should realize that the messengers are like physicians, while the people are like patients and the Quran is like a treasury filled with medicines: "What We reveal in the Quran is a healing and a mercy" (Q17:82). All commentaries and explanations are different medicines or sherbets for the people. "Where have We given anything superfluous in the Quran?" In other words, there is nothing needful for the people in religious or worldly affairs which We have not placed in the Holy Quran. Nevertheless, until a person becomes pure both inwardly and outwardly, he cannot gain intimate knowledge of the secrets of the Quran. "None will see Him except the pure." All are kept at the door. Until a person has trodden the path of religion and caught a glimpse of the reality of the work, he will not find the way to the subtleties and joyful tidings of the Quran. This has been hinted at thus:

All this knowledge is a confined body:
How to travel the Path to God is something else.
How can words, which blacken a page,
Change a sorrowful heart into a radiant moon?

The Path to God can be traversed by the heart. Moreover, the heart experiences joy and misery, good health and sickness. Physicians of the heart know about these. They are the messengers and, after them, the sheikhs of the Path and scholars of the life to come. Prophecy has come to an end in our era with Muhammad, the Seal of the prophets and Apostle of God. Undoubtedly what of the greatest importance in the beginning for a helpless seeker is the performance of humble tasks³⁶⁸ as instructed by the sheikhs of the Path and

scholars of the life to come. Realize that this is the path to be trodden, and these physicians will deal with sicknesses of the heart.

The Way is long and filled with calamities, O son:
 A traveller along the Way needs a guide.
 How can a blind man possibly walk straight?
 It would be sinful for a blind man to walk without a staff.
 When you experience pain a guide will appear:
 A key will appear for the lock of your pain.

This, in reality, is what is called the world, not what people nowadays call the world, or understand the world to mean. Memorizers of traditions, relators of sayings and contentious people are different. "They are like donkeys bearing books." Scholars of the life to come, on the other hand, "are like prophets. The scholars of a community are like the prophets of the sons of Israel" is their title. "And what is from the Prophet except 'and his regard is upon his community.'" This is a saying of Khwaja Fuzail Iyaz. This group consists of masters of the heart and of spiritual insight who have passed beyond the realms of dominion and angelic powers. Their knowledge and understanding is of another kind, of which the world has no knowledge.

The relish and understanding of masters of the heart is different,
 For it exceeds the understanding of both worlds.
 Anyone who is granted that understanding,
 Is himself plunged into an ocean of secrets.
 When that understanding, which is like revelation, arises
 Then it will be proper to speak in His language.

Take care lest anyone with his shallow intellect should seek to make use of such things and become proud. O unfortunate one, the person who perishes by the sword or wields a sword is different from one who eats breadcrumbs and licks the plate. There is no way at all a person like this can be considered equal to the former. A holy man has this to say about the matter:

If one day you are drawn to this field,
 You will see the writing which pertains to men.
 At that moment, from these loving glances, you will see
 A hundred thousand meanings, understand and believe.

It might happen that someone says: "How does an inexperienced beginner know that this person is a scholar of the life to come and has traversed this Way and become a master of the heart and a skilful physician?" In this work should a beginning be made through such a person or through scholars of the world? These are liars and pretenders.³⁶⁹ In this work one should not begin with such persons.

O brother, whatever has been appointed will necessarily come to pass: either a master of the heart will be brought to him, or he will be taken to his door so that the order issued from eternity is carried out. That Wealth will by no means be acquired by anyone who has been created for calamity. "Everything for which

he has been created is made easy." There is an interpretation and explanation for both. If someone says, "Both are servants. Where did this disparity come from?" say: But it is a long time since it was proclaimed in heaven and upon the earth: "He does not ask. He does." The secret has been expressed thus:

Even though one has to search for the Way in all directions,
The wonder is that your feet cannot carry you a hair's breadth.
What sort of a Threshold is this? Its lock has no key!
What sort of Ocean is this? Its depth is fathomless.

When a scribe writes 'b' on his paper, it cannot become a 'q' or an 'f.' If the creation of an Abu Jahl has been decreed, he cannot become an Abu Yazid.³⁷⁰

Situations can never prove fruitful for a person of ill-fortune:
It is not possible to display states to one and all.
If the circling heavens have sown sorrow for us,
In no state will happiness be reached.

This is the stage about which it is said: "the pen reached this far and the head was broken." Pay heed to the command of the Lord of the world³⁷¹ and experience peace: "When it is question of the divine decree, stop!" A dear friend has expressed it thus:

Alas, is there anything in what I have said?
The eyes are blind, and the Way is crooked.

Letter 120

RETURNING TO THE GLORIOUS AND HONOURED LORD

Most dear brother, Malik Mahmud, precious to God, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! You should know that, no matter how much stain of sin, impurity and disobedience exists, you should fight by seeking pardon according to the decision given on this matter by the Master of the Law:³⁷² "If any one of you sins much, he should repent greatly. The One who sent me burns up sins just as fire burns up wood." He also said: "No harm accrues to a person who repents, even if he sins seventy times a day, but turns back."

O brother, remaining unstained by sin from beginning to end pertains to angels, while being stained by sin from beginning to end is associated with devils. Falling into sin and rising out of sin, on the other hand, applies to Adam and to his descendants. When a man sins, he falls, and when he repents, he rises, and when he rises he acquires the wealth of "The one who repents is like a sinless person." For a man, sin is nothing astonishing, for lust and passion are kneaded into his very composition. For him it is repentance which is astonishing. Glory be to God! In a station such as paradise, and regarding a servant like Adam, having the crown of prophethood and the throne of vicegerency and prohibition, that very one – "and don't come near to this tree (Q2:35) – did not find safety. He fell, but he rose again. He said: "Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Q7:23).

Nowadays when the world is an abode full of calamities, how could Adam's unfortunate children, sorely tried with so many commands and prohibitions, and with an adversary like Satan hot in pursuit, and an enemy like their selfish soul inside their very clothing, not sin? Of course they would! The Apostle has also said: "If you had not been sinful God Most Exalted would have taken you away and brought another people in your place who would commit sin and seek forgiveness, and God Most Exalted would forgive them."

In the very act of forgetting You I was rebellious:
 This is why I chose the field of disobedience.
 When I saw Your work of veiling sins,
 With my own hands I tore apart my veil.
 Even if no one else forgives my sins,
 All I need is Your forgiveness: that's all.

Do you know what this is all about? It is said that the disobedience of a servant contains a profound secret and deep wisdom. If there had been no sin on your part or mine, there would have been no manifestation of the Pardoner and Concealer of sins. A dear friend says that the Glorious, Exalted Lord has two treasures. One is filled with merits and miracles, and one is filled with mercy and forgiveness. If a believing servant had not been devoted to God, merits and miracles would not have been showered upon him. If he had not been disobedient and there had been no sin on his part, the treasury of mercy and forgiveness would have remained unused. Understand and appreciate this fact. Nevertheless, it is not at all opportune for the mount of desire to be driven onto the field of things sought after, for it then becomes easy for a person to stain his heart by embarking upon sin. A person should be careful. That is His robe of honour and miracles, and His grace and mercy. For his part, however, a servant should be careful to behave well. He should not step beyond the limits imposed by his servitude. He should be so fearful of sin or unbecoming behaviour that, if a proclamation were to be made tomorrow on the field of the Resurrection that no one would enter hell that day except for one person, he would think that he was that person.

Finally, you have heard of the grief and lamentation of the prophets over their faults. It is said that Khwaja Fuzail Iyaz used to look at himself in a mirror several times a day. Someone asked him why he looked at himself in a mirror so many times a day. He replied: "Out of fear that my face might have turned black."

The more a servant experiences honour and consolation from the Lord, the more he should be afraid and intensify his efforts to be well behaved and become more submissive. He should not lose himself in those honours and consolations, but should come forward with lamentation and helplessness.

When a black blanket is given to me,
 Make it as white as my hair, O Merciful One!
 Don't turn me away without hope from Your threshold:
 Graciously change my blackness into white!

Letter 121

HOPE IN GOD MOST EXALTED

Don't turn me away without hope from Your threshold:
Graciously change my blackness into white!

O brother, wherever you happen to be, and in whatever work you may be engaged, don't lose hope, because the works of the Lord transcend in holiness the devotion of those who are obedient and are untrammeled by the sins of sinners. He does whatever He wants. No cause stands in the way.

He does not purchase devotion each and every time,
But He does buy weakness and helplessness all the time.

Thus it is that men of religion say: "A person is blessed because God bestows grace upon him, not because of what he does or what he is." This is because, if grace depended on action, then previous communities would certainly have received more grace than this one, for they have existed for seven hundred, eight hundred or a thousand years. They have done and accomplished much, while this community is not more than sixty or seventy years old. Inevitably its deeds and achievements are quite modest. Nevertheless this community has received more grace than all the others.

Similarly, if grace depended on one's nature, Satan would have been more blessed than Adam, for he was made from dazzling fire, while Adam comes from black mud. Nevertheless he received more grace than Satan did. Thus we know that grace does not depend on deeds or one's nature. In other words, deeds and nature are not causes with respect to the grace of the Lord. Thus it stands established that no one is blessed except the person upon whom God Most Exalted bestows His grace.

O brother, when the Master is unrestricted His control is unlimited. If anyone is raised to the heights of paradise he arrives there apart from deeds and good works. And if someone is taken down to the depths of hell, he arrives there apart from crimes and sins.

If you bring a friend from an idol-temple
You are making a friend of a stranger.
Sometimes you raise up from such a treasure-house
Someone like Abu Talib, a worshipper of stone.

For example, Muhammad the Apostle of God was raised to the highest heaven apart from any submission or work on his part, even before he came into existence. And Abu Jahl was borne off to the depths of hell before committing any sins, even before he came into existence. "Those people are in paradise. So what? And those are in hell. So what?" He is not at all afraid of anyone. He does whatever He wants. Fear is involved in exercising authority in the kingdom of someone else. When authority is exercised in one's own domain, where would fear come from? All fear Him, be He fears none. If the whole world were to be surrounded by the righteousness of Abu Bakr, the Righteous One, "there would

be no increase in His kingdom," and if the whole world resounded to Pharaoh's claim, "I am your exalted lord," (Q79:24) "there would be no decrease in His kingdom." A poet has said:

What sort of a Threshold is this, having a lock without a key?
And what sort of an Ocean is this, with a fathomless bottom?
If you enter this Ocean for but a moment,
You will see a World that will inflame your astonished heart.

Letter 122

THE CITADEL OF THE SELFISH SOUL: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Annihilate whatever pertains to the Way and opinion,
To enable your heart to become the abode of God.
In duality a good mind is confused:
The eyes of faith see nothing of duality.

My very dear son, Abdul Malik, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri. You should read them carefully once or twice. Your letter, my son, reached me. I read it attentively. My son, don't concentrate on saying as many prayers as you can, or fasting as much as you can. Concentrate rather on how to remove your infidel soul which has laid hold of the Way. This is the work of anyone who seeks God. A person has the weighty responsibility of removing his selfish soul from the Way. This is by virtue of the command to overcome one's state, whether by a turban or a sacred thread, or by a mosque or an idol-temple.

If the thought of my Beloved occurs to me in a fire-temple,
It would be a sin if I were to walk around the Ka'ba.
The Ka'ba is a fire-temple if it contains no trace of Him:
By means of union with Him a fire-temple becomes my Ka'ba.

Those known as masters of insight make a Way out of what is not one. This is what is meant and hinted at in the following:

On the tree of the eternity of both worlds
Is found the Path from unbelief to being a Muslim.

It is also said:

What is poverty? It is travelling the Way, by losing it,
And not reaching out for anything in either world.

These are people taken up with appearances and foolishness. Here they will humble themselves or say, "He is mad," as they are saying about poor Ahmad Bihari.³⁷³ Thus it is said:

Although a heedless person laughs at this work,
An intelligent one is pleased with nothing else.

My son, man is the purest and choicest portion of all creation. His work is not trivial.

Man is not compounded of water and dust:
From head to toe he consists of a pure soul.
What will a hundred thousand pure angels do?
Finally they will prostrate before the seed of man.

Glory be to God! My son, when a world of pure and holy angels prostrates before polluted dust which has been trodden underfoot by hundreds of thousands of animals, and dust, which is without any worth or value, becomes a vicegerent, then "this is a great secret which none can fathom." Seek within yourself what you are after.

What you have lost you have distorted:
Within yourself you are a veil for yourself.

As someone has said: "The Way to God is not in heaven or on earth, in the east or the west, or even in the Tablet or Pen, Throne or Footstool: it is within you." This is the same thing. Be careful! Give the work your full attention at this stage and listen to these couplets:

When the angels prostrated before Adam
A particle of His love came into existence.
When Adam's soul discovered the Way to God,
He hastened to be eternally at His service.
Until awareness dawned in Adam's soul,
No one knew the Way to God.
The Way appeared when Adam did:
The key to both worlds appeared with him

The angels, with their sanctity and purity, reached the stage of "Moreover they are highly respected servants" (Q21:26). "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54), however, applies to dust and water so that you might know that dust and water has whatever they have.

When dust became engaged with Purity,
The Throne prostrated in the dust before Adam.

"God created Adam according to His image." Imam Ghazali used to say: "O according to His quality!" This is why they say that the reality of a human being is clearly a secret of the divinity. This is expressed thus:

Above you there is no other creature:
There is no other beloved beyond you.
Since you are beyond intellect and knowledge,
You cannot be described or catalogued.
Whatever comes within the ambit of absolute faith
Comes wholly within you, O verifier of Reality.

It is not possible to write more than this. The zealous head of the police has

already settled on the punishment and is saying:³⁷⁴ "It is better to kill the person who speaks openly about divine oneness rather than allow him to live."

Be careful not to speak about the secret of union:
 If you are a sincere lover, there are secrets.
 You saw that there was a secret attached to the favour of love:
 Hallaj spoke out and went to the gallows.

Letter 123

GRIEF AND REPENTANCE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Dearest brother, so precious to me, Sheikh Sulaiman, may God be generous to you in both worlds! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Read what I have written and rest assured that your precious letter reached me. I read it carefully. I see you have been quite sick and you have described it all in full detail. O brother, nowadays we are in the middle of the seventh century³⁷⁵ and faith has become a stranger in the world and a believer has become as scarce as the philosopher's stone. Finally you must have heard: "In the beginning Islam was a stranger." In the end it will also be a stranger. Our own age is the one being referred to. What should be done? We should fling the dust of our afflictions upon our heads and lament over ourselves.

Faith cannot emerge from a life like yours:
 The night you die will manifest the day of faith.
 Any desire which occurs before this
 Is but custom and habit, not faith.

How can you ask nowadays about those works which pertain to men, not to us hermaphrodites? How could the gift of that wealth be given to us unfortunate ones? One³⁷⁶ who is today considered a follower of the Way and master of perception has this to say:

I don't know for what I remain held captive in this life:
 I'm not a Hindu or a Muslim, apostate or a wrongdoer.

O brother, what should be said to you and me?
 The one to whom He showed His face
 Was not in a state, nor was a word heard.
 He was astonished and lost to himself,
 For it became impossible even to breathe.

O brother, the group that was engaged in that work has disappeared from our midst. Nowadays a few foolish people have got caught up in themselves. They have adorned themselves with their own form and appearance and have claimed to have knowledge and mystical experience. When you look into the matter you will discover that they don't even know what unbelief is, so what can you expect their faith to be like?

The world is full of sick people, but physicians have departed from our midst.

Also:

The company of good people has left the world:
A feast of honey has turned into a wasps' nest.

In the time of Khwaja Hasan Basri someone put this question to him: "Khwaja, what were the friends of the Messenger like?" He said: "They were such that if you had seen them you would have said they were all out of their minds. On the other hand, if they had seen you, they would have said that you were all devils!" This happened in the time of Khwaja Hasan Basri, whose age adjoined that of some of the companions. Nowadays what do they say and what are they like! Mercy be upon the soul of Khusrau who said:

People say: "Go and don a sacred-thread, O idol-worshipper!"
In Khusrau's body, which vein is not a sacred thread?

O brother, they have shaved their hair and beards, donned the sacred thread and entered idol-temples and taverns. This is why it is said:

What is poverty? It is travelling the Way by losing it,
And refraining from laying hold of either world.

This is what they saw when they looked into themselves and their gaze has penetrated to the reality of unbelief and faith. They see that everything is opinion and sacred thread, all is claim and talk, not Islam, for being a Muslim is something else: Muslims are birds of another feather!

All is as nothing compared to His glorious being:
He holds aloft the standard of self-sufficiency.
The person in seclusion experiences therein all secrets:
He becomes completely independent of being independent.
His eye extends to the dominion of Adam,
And his name to the ends of the earth.
It is our whole endeavour to be Your slaves:
We are totally given over to knowing You.
Having drunk one draught of the visage of the Cup-bearer,
Whatever else remains is consigned to the scrap-heap.
When one has been struck by the presence of God,
Everything else is cast aside and trodden under foot.

That transformed lover, Ain ul-Quzat Hamadani – the mercy of God be upon him – used to say: "Young man, every defect springs from faith, in the sense that it is lacking. And you are proud of being a believer! If you wish to see the beauty of faith, strive to become a believer so you can remove the sacred thread of pride from around your neck. When that happens you will be able to see the beauty of faith and be able to proclaim it throughout the world."

Anyone who has not seen You has seen nothing:
The person who has not found You has found nothing.

Now, since this is the situation, being unemployed or without hope are not conditions.

Along this Way, if you do not do that,
Use hands and feet: nothing will be lacking.

If manly faith is lacking at least there should be the faith of old women or hermaphrodites. What can be done? If the radiant sun has set, a lamp has to suffice. Otherwise what about us, and what about Pharaoh and Nimrod, and what about Christians and Jews? "O Succour of the needy, come to our aid!"

In brief, our story is quite long. No matter how much we write, we can never reach the end.

The night has passed, but my tale is incomplete:
How long is the night? My tale takes long in telling.

Since you, my brother, had written a letter, and had experienced many troubles, it was necessary to send a reply. Hence I may be excused, for something had to be written. May you come to a good end!

Letter 124

THE FEAR OF BEING SORELY TRIED BECAUSE A SERVANT DOES NOT KNOW

My son, it is related that the Apostle had no safe haven from fear or trials. Thus he could say: "I don't know what affliction I shall have to suffer or what you will have to suffer." What should be done? A servant who does not experience fear or tremble when being tested by the Lord should, every hour, for a brief moment, be tried by something. After testing, a sense of security is experienced in time of danger, whether anything happens or not. The stronger a person is, the more severe is his testing. Don't you see that Moses was separated from his mother at break of day but was returned to her at the time of the evening prayer, because he was weak. The messenger Joseph was separated from his father. After forty years - or, according to one account, after eighty years - he was again restored to him, for he was strong.

Testing is of two kinds. It can be through blessings and things desired, as happened to the messenger Solomon, or by trials and sorrows, as happened to the messenger Jacob. When a person is being tested by means of blessings, gratitude is being sought, while testing by trials and sorrows is for the sake of engendering patience. Danger is present in both forms. A person will either find favour with God or not. If he finds favour, there will be peace and salvation, but if he is excluded from divine favour, he will be destroyed.³⁷⁷ The whole of religion thus comes back to either gratitude or patience. This is the origin of the prophetic saying: "Faith has two halves: one is gratitude, while the other is patience." Moreover, testing will continue until death. A servant must therefore always remain alert, engaged in humbling himself and crying for help, as well as in fear and trembling, lest he fail the test and not secure the graces of gratitude and patience, and thus end up being destroyed. There is hope that this fear may end up being

the cause of his salvation and deliverance for, if it occurs, he will gain the graces of gratitude and patience.

My son, the great man, the Lord of both worlds, wore the crown of sinlessness upon his head. He used to say: "O that Muhammad's Lord had not created Muhammad!" His wealth consists in this: "If you weigh the faith of Abu Bakr against that of my community, his would prevail," and he also used to say: "O that I were a leaf on a tree so that a goat might eat me!" His rank and station is that of: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its door," yet he used to say: "O that I had been my mother's menstrual flow!" How can there be question of anyone else's feeling safe and secure? He does whatever He wants and is afraid of nobody.

What is the reward of a hundred thousand years of devotion?

He places around your neck the chain of "being accursed."

For His unrestricted nature, what is unbelief and what is faith?

For One without a tongue, what is doubt and what is certainty?

Thus when a mystic, who was undergoing the pangs of death, was asked if there was anything he wanted the bystanders to bring him, he replied: "Yes, nothingness, for it has no existence."

O that Iraqi no longer existed!

As long as you exist, all is turmoil.

Similarly, a dervish was sick. A friend came to how he was. He asked what the cause of his sickness was. He replied: "Existence!" A friend of God used to say: "No matter how much I say about the happiness and comfort of the world of nothingness, I could not describe one percent of it: while, no matter how much I describe the unhappiness and toil of the world of existence, I could not describe one percent of it."

O that my mother had not given birth to me,

Since I have not done to death my infidel soul.

Letter 125

THE BENEFITS OF POVERTY AND THE POOR, AND FINDING FAULT WITH RICHES AND THE RICH

Being a dervish results in complete comfort. Once and for all there is freedom from the calamities of the world, yet there is also extreme hardship in being a dervish. This is because a dervish has become a poor man. The very night this happens he experiences an ascent according to the saying of the people of the bench and of power.³⁷⁸ "A faqir experiences an ascent the night he experiences poverty." There is no blessing more exalted than that of being a dervish.

Although Solomon had achieved so much

That his sway extended from earth to heaven:

When he realized the value of poverty,

He earned his food by weaving baskets.

O brother, poverty is a great secret. Whatever existed in the visible and invisible worlds was placed before the Apostle on the Night of Ascent. He did not even look at it out of the corner of his eye! He said: "Poverty is my boast." Adam was made the object of angelic prostrations and the eight heavens were bestowed upon him. His glance fell upon the secret of poverty. He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat and donned the garb of poverty.

**When Adam's soul was inflamed by the secret of poverty,
He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.**

If you are not given today what was bestowed upon Nimrod and Pharaoh, understand it in the context of this secret. Don't you see that the King of the Prophets and the Leader of the Saints returned from the Night of Ascent only to find there was no food in the house for the day. He asked a Jew to lend him a bowl of barley. The Jew replied: "You have no garden, nor do you cultivate anything. How could you return it?" He gave his blessed coat of mail as a pledge in order to get a bowl of barley.

**When the Chosen One returned from his Ascent,
He asked a Jew to lend him some barley.
He was seeking it as he had no food,
And that dog of a Jew demanded a pledge!
He saw both worlds on that illuminated night,
Yet there was no barley in his house the next day.
Inevitably when this or that was all the same to him,
Both worlds came under the sway of his command.**

Letter 126

THE EXCELLENCE OF MAN OVER EARTH, HEAVEN AND ALL THAT EXISTS

Imam Muzaffar, prayerful greetings!³⁷⁹ Read this carefully.

**Whatever is found in Unfettered Oneness
Is all found in you, O investigator of reality.
Since you are beyond intellect and mystical knowledge
You are not grasped by a commentary or by qualities.
No creature exists more exalted than you:
Apart from you, there is no other beloved.**

Study attentively these couplets of Khwaja Attar and understand the signs and indications they contain in accordance with the Law. Do this in order to realize that whatever exists does not do so outside of you. Whatever you seek must be sought within yourself. This is confirmed from the Quran: "And in yourselves. Do you not see" (Q51:21)? Pay attention to those who say that the Path to God is not in heaven or on earth, nor in the east or the west: it is within you.

**Be careful! At first Adam hastened towards whatever exists:
Until he found the way to himself, he did not find the Way.**

Glory be to God! When a world full of pure, holy angels prostrates before impure, unclean dust, while this dust, of no worth or value, becomes a vicegerent worthy of dominion over the eight heavens, then "This is a great secret." It is not susceptible to intellectual analysis, for poor intellect is an instrument of service. Of what use is it in grasping the secrets of the divinity?

Intellect is necessary for service:
 Your soul is necessary to exercise lordship.
 It is harmful if the intellect expands:
 If the soul excels, it becomes ever lovelier.

"Glory be to me! How great I am"³⁸⁰ and "I am God"³⁸¹ can come from unclean dust! It is a mysterious puzzle which cannot be solved by anyone. Where are you and I in all of this? Grasp what is said in these couplets:

Whatever exists in the whole world – that am I:
 Nothing like me has appeared in either world!
 I don't know whether I am anything or not:
 Since everything is finally He, who am I?

A certain person was intent on solving this difficulty. He wrote many volumes and issued legal decisions, yet had no knowledge of his own condition.³⁸² What should be done? This is a puzzle which none can solve. Listen to these verses:

You are a gnat yet ride upon an elephant:
 You want to use your hand to get it to move.
 You are a finch and alight upon the mountain of qaf'
 So that, using your beak, you may split it like kaf.³⁸³
 Dig a little, as at a pleasant spring,
 To make a great river for all to drink.
 This work is beyond your likeness:
 Tell Me, how often should I rattle your chain?

At this point Imam Shibli said: "You utterly astonish me! Lead me by the hand." From here on excuse me, for there is no road beyond this point. A friend of God made this excuse.

O foolish one, whatever I said was nothing:
 I am blind and the Way is tortuous.
 Although they seek the Way in all directions from here,
 Astonishingly they don't move a hair's breadth from here.
 The blood of the upright is poured out in sighing for this,
 And heaven pours dust on what separates them.

Letter 127

CONTEMPT FOR SPIRITUAL STATES AND RELYING ON THE MAJESTIC LORD

Your letter, dear Shamsuddin,³⁸⁴ proof of the activity of those precious to God, reached me through the love of the saints. I read it. O brother, it doesn't matter how much – as far as you and I are concerned – unbelievers and idolaters feel ashamed of your Islam or mine, or that Jews and Christians are one hundred percent scornful of the way you and I practise our religion. Someone has bewailed the situation thus:

O that my mother had never given birth to me,
And thus my infidel soul could never kill me!
O that I had never been named,
And my rest never disturbed!
Negligence dogs my steps, no matter what I do:
Nothing attains completion, no matter what I do.

Dear friend, pull yourself together, for the sin and unfaithfulness of the whole world would not equal one drop in the ocean of His mercy! What space would your sins and mine occupy in that ocean? Mercy be upon the soul of Khwaja Attar who said:

If all sins, from the very beginning to the end,
Were displayed before heaven and earth:
From the margins of His vast expanse, those sins
Would be erased entirely from where they were found.
If a few drops of sin should appear,
How could they be seen in such an Ocean?

Dear friend, the sin of a slave contains a precious secret and wisdom. If your sins and mine did not exist, there would not have been any manifestation of the bountiful forgiveness of God or of His veiling of sins. The person who said the following³⁸⁵ gave a hint about this: "By the One who holds my life in His hands, if you do not commit sin, God will remove you and bring a people in your place who will commit sin and cry out for forgiveness, and He will forgive them."

In the very act of forgiving, You seek the sinner:
For this reason I have laid hold of sin's courtyard.
When I saw the completed work through Your veil
With my very own hands I tore away the curtain.
I saw Your mercy, thirsty for sin,
And shed copious tears for my sins.

Dear Friend, it would be astonishing if man and sin were not found together. When the father, crowned with purity, entrusted with vicegerency and having become the object of angelic prostrations, did not find safety in the house of safety, how could his children, afflicted with hundreds of sins in the house of calamity, find refuge there? Alas! Thus it is that "all the sons of Adam are sinful,

but the best of sinners are those who repent." We should also say what our father said: "My Lord, I have done harm to my soul. If You had not forgiven me and shown mercy to me, I would certainly have been among the losers." This prayer should be said:

If I bring a whole world of devotion as a present,
 You remain independent, even of independence.
 If all my possessions were a world full of sin,
 You are content with that, O King.
 Even if my unbelief amounts to no more than my sin,
 For your forgiveness, all I need to do is beg pardon.
 Show me the Way: put my record right:
 And wash both worlds from the slate of my soul.

Dear friend, the sayings of the King of prophets and the Crown of the saints, "What would have happened if I had not confessed to God and sought pardon from Him more than seventy times a day," and "Since there was a slight stain on my soul, I asked pardon from God a hundred times a day" contain this very intimation and taste.

Dear friend, those who are filled with purity, from the very beginning to the end of the work, are the angels. Those who are polluted from the very beginning to the end of the work are the devils. What is proper to the sons of Adam, however, is this very falling and rising. This story applies to all, not merely to you and me. Thus, as far as possible, do not shirk from the effort needed. In other words, a person should be inflamed with this pain and grief.

It is better for you to experience a touch of the pain of God
 Than to acquire both this world and the next.
 Unbelief for the unbeliever and religion for the man of religion:
 Just a touch of Your pain for the heart of Attar!
 If none of Your pain remained for Attar,
 He would not want to be an unbeliever or a man of religion.

O brother, here the work is accomplished by grace. Take hold of the hour that is at hand. Pass beyond earth and heaven. Finally, take a look at Pharaoh's magicians. What work have they done, and what devotion do they have? In their very unbelief and infidel behaviour the crown of mystical knowledge was itself placed upon their heads and worlds were revealed to them, for My work does not depend on causes. Whomsoever I wish, I exalt to the highest heaven; and whomsoever I wish, I banish to the deepest depths. There is no intervening cause.³⁸⁶

A country is entrusted to the hands of a shepherd:
 His favour is conferred upon a world.
 After completing a hundred thousand years of devotion
 The yoke of being accursed is placed around his neck.

Just as no one, in this Presence, should be without hope, even if he is burdened with the sins of all the world; so also, no one should feel secure, even if he possesses the devotion of the entire world.

Letter 128**SEEKING THE WAY AND SUBDUIING ONE'S UNRULY SOUL**

Imam Iftikhar³⁸⁷, may God grant you an insight into the defects of your soul and how to eradicate them! Your excellent letter has reached me, together with a precious memento. I have read it carefully. It brought me pleasure. May you make progress! All those who are making an effort will certainly make progress. May there be no delay in attaining the Object sought!

Sufi, you should think a little
 In order to acquire the skill to find a treasure:
 But you will have to exert yourself greatly
 To have This Treasure revealed to you.

Nevertheless the exertion should be according to the Law and the principles of this group, so that what you are seeking may not be lost, as this group has indicated and pointed out.

Proceed along the Way, for it is a sign given to you:
 Make an effort, for the secret is a gift bequeathed to you.
 Strive, night and day, in the lane of grief:
 Suddenly you may see the face of That Treasure.

That sign is not in heaven or on earth, nor is it in the west or the east. It has been said: "The heart is the house of God."

The world turns its gaze towards the beauty of my face:
 The King of the world is in my humble heart.

In other words, the Way to the Glorious and Exalted God is not in heaven, or on the earth, nor is it in the west or the east: the Way to God is within you, in what people call the 'heart'.

As long as Adam's soul was not enlightened,
 He did not know the Way to the Omnipotent.
 The Way appeared along with Adam:
 With him appeared the key to both worlds.

O brother, when a world filled with pure and holy angels prostrates before dust, and when this impure dust, subject to every form of baseness, becomes God's vicegerent, then this is an incredible mystery. Consider all this very carefully. God willing, you will be helped to grasp the meaning.

Really and truly You are within me:
 Since I have found You, why should I seek?

O brother, don't preoccupy yourself with, "How can I perform many ritual prayers," or "How can I keep many fasts?" Your entire effort should be along these lines: "How can I remove my infidel soul which has blocked the Way? By what means can it be removed from the Way?" This is a strict duty imposed upon you by virtue of the demands of your state. According to the injunction of this

group, you can be in the act of prostrating or in an idol-temple; wearing a turban or a sacred thread. Everything else is vain desire. Consider this question:

If I am thinking of my Beloved in an idol-temple,
It would be sinful to walk around the Ka'ba.
If the Ka'ba has no fragrance of His, it is a church:
With the fragrance of union with Him, a church becomes my Ka'ba.

As you have heard, some have worn a sacred thread; some have entered idol-temples; and some have been attracted to taverns by the fragrance of wine. All have been overcome by a particular state. Notice the meaning contained in these verses:

Once again my guide gave a robe for a sacred-thread:
He gave the earnings of ninety years to the unbelievers.
He prostrated before an idol and followed a false religion:
Taking his Quran and prayer-carpet he gave them to a vintner.
Setting aside asceticism he roamed as a Qalandar:
For a bottle of wine he handed over his robe and turban.
He quickly turned towards his heart in prayer, and long remained there:
He turned towards his Beloved, and his Friend gave him a burden.

Keep this letter away from foolish prattlers and unweaned babies lest you be contaminated by their idle chatter. On the other hand, don't withhold it from mature seekers. This is because revealing it to the immature is as reprehensible as withholding it from the mature. This group, in its religious practice, has developed its own technical vocabulary which differs from the usual meaning of words. Some examples are: everlastingness and transformation; intoxication and sobriety; uniting and scattering; absence and presence, and so on. Thus it is that knowledge should not be given to the immature, nor withheld from the mature, for both are forbidden.

The food which is given to those pure ones
Can in no way be given to beginners.

If those immature ones are some day granted a portion of the wealth of this group they will themselves understand what it is.

If you are called one day to play upon this field,
Look at these words, which have been penned for men.
At every moment you are touched, you will see,
Understand, and hold fast a hundred thousand meanings.

Letter 129

CONTEMPT FOR RICHES, AND ABANDONING THE WORLD

If a contented person goes in for begging
In reality he is exercising kingship.
If you have bread and threadbare garments
The tip of every hair of yours would be a king.

O brother, a dervish has many provisions and experiences different kinds of comfort. Wealth has many drawbacks as well as different kinds of grief and adversity. Thus it is said:

Abandon the world in order to become a king:
 Otherwise your head will spin like the heavens.
 Whatever does not descend with you to the dust
 Belongs to the world, not to pure religion.

Since the love people have for possessions and position is an idol, an object of worship, they have become blind and deaf. They consider all the drawbacks of wealth as benefits, while they account all the benefits of poverty as drawbacks. This was the religion of the accursed Nimrod and Pharaoh. Nimrod used to revile Abraham, the Friend of God, for his poverty, while Pharaoh used to find fault with Moses, the Converser with God, for his poverty. It would not be astonishing if those who follow their religion in this life are condemned along with them on the Day of Resurrection. "Whoever imitates a people becomes one of them."

Whatever preoccupies your mind in this world
 Will prove to be, eternally, your path to union.

All scholars and learned men are united in affirming that there is no stage more exalted than that of being a dervish, and no possession more joyful than contentment.

No one can experience, in this world of earth and seas,
 Any greater boon than that of contentment.
 All who show their mettle in doing without things
 Experience possessions as ice upon their hearts.

Those endowed with insight say that the abandonment of the world is the indication of a person's mystical knowledge. Wherever there is abandonment of the world it is clear that mystical knowledge is present. Conversely, wherever it is not found, it is understood that mystical knowledge is not present either, for abandonment and mystical knowledge are the two meanings of the profession of faith. The profession of faith is composed of a negation and an affirmation. The negation refers to the abandonment of the world, while mystical knowledge of the Lord is what is affirmed. Whoever has abandoned the world has made a complete negation, while anyone who has acquired mystical knowledge of God has made a complete affirmation. This is proclaiming "There is no god but God" in very truth. If you say, "There is no god but God" as a course of habit, of what profit is it? It has been well put thus:

Abandon the world so that your religion may flourish:
 Give that away so that this may become yours.
 If your heart becomes aware of what this is all about,
 It means your efforts have resulted in abandonment.

Letter 130

UNDERSTANDING HOW GRACE COMES TO THOSE WHO ARE READY FOR IT: ANOTHER EXPOSITION

Anyone endowed with such beauty
 Could lawfully take pride in it.
 If He allows lovers to enter His world
 It shows just what He can do.
 The beauty and goodness created by Him
 Would not be harmful, but utterly perfect.

Khwaja Muhazzab,³⁸⁸ may God favour you with His love! Your letter arrived and has been read. Let your mind remain steady, dear friend, in its present state. Grace is in no way restricted, "but it is for the one who is ready for it." Thus it is said that wealth does not pass by anyone who is ready for it. If somebody is ready, he will receive it with profit. He knows that "all things have their appointed times." Wisdom's requirement is that a person should be waiting at the door of "the One who discerns mankind's needs" for that time to arrive. When it does, without a single question or need of yours being expressed, grace will do its work and say: "I am yours, whether you want it or not."

God bestows the crown of prophethood on a shepherd:
 Otherwise, how could a shepherd know about prophethood?

Moreover, since you long for Him in a special way, you seek to have in hand what is promised, and wish that the appointed hour had already arrived.

Either fulfill my desire or free me of this desire:
 Free me of promises! Do one thing or the other.

It was not astonishing that Moses said, "Lord, show Yourself to me that I may look upon You" (Q7:143). This is like a surety. Otherwise the prophets, the most intelligent of men, would have known that the world is not the abode of that wealth. Although vision is lawful, it is promised for tomorrow. You seek the victory of your yearning as something experienced today, not promised for tomorrow.

When a dedicated lover senses the Mystery,
 This response is evoked: "You cannot see Me!"
 O friend, realize that in My radiance,
 No why or wherefore exists - only hints.

Since there was no scope for wisdom, no matter how praiseworthy it is, the response came: "You cannot see Me." Khwaja Attar has expressed it thus:

For love, what does today care about tomorrow?
 Infidelity and religion belong here, but not there.
 It behoves a lover to feel deeply moved
 Because of abundant feelings of love.

"Love is a divine madness." Intellect is left behind in this affair.

Men do not know intimately Love's secrets:
 Except God none is privy to Love's secrets.

O brother, by its very nature the sun bestows light in abundance. If someone who is fit and capable, however, remains veiled because of an obstruction, the deprivation would be on that account, not because of a withholding of favours on the part of the sun. All of us are guilty of our own infidelities. We should throw dust upon our heads and grieve for ourselves. If we don't experience the joy of finding, at least there would be the sorrow and anguish of not finding, as the poet has expressed it:

Union is for the elect. Woe to me, I am not among them!
To estimate the extent of my defection, look at what I do!

Also:

You yourself don't know the secret of union with Me:
I Myself know what gifts are commonly bestowed.

Letter 13

ANSWERS TO MAULANA MUZAFFAR'S QUESTIONS CONCERNING WHAT MAULANA HAMIDUDDIN NAGORI³⁸⁹ HAD WRITTEN

Saying 'I' at the time of divine manifestation
Would be no fault for the one who does so.
Here and now, when utterly overwhelmed,
My soul bears witness to nothing but God.

When this verse is revealed to the seeker,³⁹⁰ "All who live on earth will pass away while the face of your Lord will remain for ever, in all its majesty and splendour" (Q55:26-7), then the utter uniqueness of "He has no associate" (Q6:163) will be made manifest to him. Tell me, apart from 'I' what else could a person utter? When a jealous police chief has decided on public punishment and says, "Killing anyone who speaks openly about divine uniqueness is better than granting life to someone else," what can be done if a person doesn't keep quiet?

If an intoxicated one speaks about the secret of His love,
His recompense along this Path would be the gallows.

Saying: O brother, in this matter the saying of those who remember God is this: "Undoubtedly when God mentions Himself He says 'I' and this 'I' is His genuine self-attribution. Whatever else is uttered, every single sound, all the words of the world and even the sounds of animals, resonates as 'I'. When a person who remembers God hears 'There is no god but God' or 'he' or 'you' or any other name, that is the sound he hears. Moreover, when he hears 'I' and cannot but continue doing so, then this is genuine remembrance."

The Glorious and Exalted God causes the seeker to hear what his own body says to him as well as the sounds uttered by all minerals, plants and animals. Here it should be seen that, if he hears from them the very same praise that he himself is uttering, then that praise would be a sound in praise of him, and this

would be putative, but not real, revelation. If he hears from them a special praise concerning everything, that would be genuine revelation, and would be real.

Reflect carefully on these two roots and all the questions which have been raised will be solved – God willing!³⁹¹ O brother, happily drink by the cupful whatever is offered to you from the tavern of divine uniqueness, but don't get intoxicated!

Do not open your mouth, for His lovers
 Prize not speech when love is involved.
 You saw how Hallaj, intoxicated by love,
 Revealed the secret and went to the gallows.

May what you drink make you as happy as possible, be a blessing for you, and increase your thirst day by day!

An Ocean of love exists without a shore:
 One thirst must turn to countless thousands!

At this stage the work depends on the quality of steadfastness. The greater the steadfastness of the one who drinks, the greater the thirst.

Those with a steadfast spirit become men:
 They stand tall and solitary like the sun.

Saying: O brother, you should shoulder the burden of the moment. A seeker has no other option. In both hardship and pleasure you should be careful, otherwise you will remain immature. This applies to everyone, not only to you.

Until you have become a focus of pain, O son,
 How can you be addressed as a man, O son?

Saying: All these things that befall a seeker do so in order to remove whatever is other than God from within him, not in order to destroy him. Be attentive and listen to these words:

When in love, how can you court another?
 It means a temple remains within your Ka'ba.
 When the very name of another no longer lingers,
 The veil will be flung aside from the Beloved.

Saying: O brother, there is no limit to manifestations when they come from the world without limits. How can they be contained in writing? It would take ages to describe them.

Giving eternal expression to the state of a lover
 Is better than explanations and descriptions.
 Both worlds could become all tongue for years on end,
 Yet fail to express the gift of experiencing true love.

Saying: No matter how deeply you drink of the boundless ocean, it is infinitely more difficult to reach the bottom than for mountains to turn to nothing. What is man in this scenario? Nevertheless, when it pertains to him, an ocean is but a drop. At this point the saying about Imam Shibli needs to be quoted: "Lord, increase

my amazement!" When he was intoxicated his thirst increased. He could drink as much as he wanted.

I am thoroughly intoxicated, yet give me wine!
Throw my robe and rosary-beads to the water!

Saying: When a person becomes accustomed to trials, trials become his delight. For this reason he is able to accept them and is therefore not shaken.

Since it is on the gallows that you see His beauty,
Nowhere can His love be found apart from gallows.

Saying: O brother, the path of divine uniqueness, which is the religion of men, is an all-embracing ocean. Here intellect and knowledge are but bare bones. What can be written about Him? What can be said or heard about Him? Whoever falls into that ocean has fallen into an astonishing world.

For a drop of water utterly lost in the ocean,
Both worlds, without God, become worthless.

Another dear one has put it thus:

Don't ask about my religion! I am happy in His uniqueness:
This religion of mine is correct, but I found others erroneous.
He is not without me or I without Him: how can I speak of two?
In the religion of those who say 'One', saying 'two' is not correct.³⁹²

Saying: O brother, the more lavishly you find graces being bestowed upon you, the more you should redouble your efforts to highlight your own weakness, indigence and baseness, and see everything from this perspective, not imagining these graces as the fruit of your own efforts. This is the way to proceed safely and not incur injury.

Count every gift you possess, O dervish,
As God's gift, not your own achievement.

It has also been expressed thus:

Everyone who considers himself as nothing,
Is reckoned as a friend in His estimation.
A lover, for the sake of the glory of the Beloved,
Becomes as nothing in this world and the next.

Saying: O brother, one necessary condition for a seeker is contentment with regard to his means of livelihood. Everyone who lacks contentment should go to the bazaar! What does he have to do with this saying: "There is no greater possession than contentment."

No one in this world, at sea or on land,
Has a greater possession than contentment.
All who excel in practising contentment
Have hearts unmoved by worldly possessions.

Saying: As long as a person is in the realm of intellect he acts correctly by honouring rights as far as possible, provided he is secure from danger. This type

of behaviour is undoubtedly profitable, not harmful. Don't you see that everyone who acts correctly achieves his aim?

Whoever has not attained the way of Muhammad
 Will not find this threshold, even if he searches for ever.
 Strive after Wealth here, and seek religion here:
 Seek here the return of people who know.

Thus it is that some, in their ignorance and vanity, set out without a guide according to their own depraved, foolish opinions and personal whims. Inevitably they arrive nowhere, even if they pass their whole life in searching.

How can a blind man walk straight?
 It would be sinful for him to walk without a staff.
 The Way is long and full of calamities, son:
 One who travels this Way is in need of a guide.
 If you experience pain, a guide will appear:
 A key will appear for your lock of pain.

O brother, there were many sayings in your letter. Since this story is a long one, how can a person reach the end?

Night has passed, yet my story is not finished:
 How long does night last? My story is quite long.

To this extent – God willing – something has hopefully been assimilated. Long ago this example was given: "A word suffices for anyone who is there." Peace!

Letter 132

GIVING SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND SUPPORT TO A DISCIPLE

At the time of union, if you gain admittance,
 You become holy and discover the pleasure of praise.
 Enter courageously the divine threshold:
 You will obtain strength to hide divine secrets.
 When your soul reached such a stage,
 You were exalted to the company of the pious.

My son, Fakhruddin, raised by God to the stage of seekers, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! I have read your letter, my son. You have written a detailed description of your state and work. It gave me much joy and pleasure to read your account. Praise be to God for all this! Congratulations! Congratulations! Continue manfully along the path of divine uniqueness, for that is the religion of men. May you be seen to be confirmed and increase daily in this work, God willing!

Since your mind is totally occupied with the Lord,
 As with Majnun, everything will become Laila for you.

Consider everything about the Way as nothing,
So that your heart may become the Lord's abode.

When you do this you will attain the wealth of "The heart of the believer is the throne of God," and the secret of "The Merciful Who is firmly established on the throne" (Q20:5) will be revealed to you, and you will hear this proclamation:

For others, union is promised for tomorrow:
For a lover, union is promised here and now.
And this royal edict will be written in your name:
Whoever has been overcome by the secret of love
Will live for all eternity as an intimate friend.

Nevertheless, my son, you have to bear the burden of the age and should accept the difficulties along the Way of divine uniqueness as though they were honey or sugar. Finally you must have heard that no treasure is acquired without enduring hardship.

You will have to exert yourself mightily
If this Treasure is to be revealed to you.
Along the path where the Treasure is found
Without a doubt trouble lies in store as well.

This doesn't apply only to you. All who travel that Path will experience this. The task of guiding you, my son, has been entrusted to Maulana Muzaffar.³⁹³ Whatever you hear from him should be considered as having been heard from this dervish. You should be submissive to him in all matters concerned with this work. Whatever occurs along the Way should be referred to him so as to seek from him a solution to the problem. You must remain steadfast, for a novice who is lacking in steadfastness will make no progress.

Take hold of God with a firm grip:
Trample underfoot whatever is not of Him.
After quaffing wine proffered by the Cup-Bearer,
Anything else at all would be left well alone.

Letter 133

THE UTTER FREEDOM OF THE LORD OF THE WORLD AND THE TESTING OF ADAM

With Your acceptance, O Unfettered by any cause,
What are the good or bad deeds of a handful of clay?
What is bad in me becomes good if You accept it:
What is good in me becomes bad if You remove it.

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! I have read your letter, brother, and understand what you are saying. In whatever situation you find yourself, and no matter what work you are doing, keep your heart broken for His sake. Anything that is broken has no value, but the more broken a heart

is, the more valuable it is. Don't be bereft of hope! The Lord's works are not bound by the obedience of the submissive or the disobedience of sinners. The Holy One is no more perfect or beautiful on account of the obedience of the submissive, nor is there any harm done to His reign and rule by the disobedience of sinners. If the whole world were adorned with the righteousness of the renowned Righteous One, there would be no increase at all in His dominion. And if the whole world were to join Pharaoh in claiming "I am your supreme lord" (Q79:24) there would be no decrease in His dominion. Thus it is said:

What is a Muslim and what is a Zoroastrian at His door?
 What is a fire-temple and what is a hermitage for Him?
 If a chaste person becomes holier, is He any the holier?
 If a king is bad, does it have any effect on Him?
 At the door of His utter self-sufficiency, what is straw or a pen?
 Whether you exist or not, what difference does it make to Him?

O brother, since He is the absolute ruler He has unlimited power. If He raises someone lacking in devotion and good works to the heights, He does so by His grace and mercy. And if He casts someone who is without fault or sin into the depths, He does so through His power and wrath. Thus it is said:

Sometimes You bring forth a Friend from an idol-temple:
 Sometimes You turn a stranger into an acquaintance.
 Sometimes from a jewel-producing family
 You raise up gravel like an Abu Talib.

As far as the untrammelled, fearless Lord is concerned, He does whatever He wants. He is afraid of no one. Fear is found in controlling something which belongs to another. Controlling what is already yours involves no fear. The story of the Devil is a warning for all, as it is said:

After completing countless years of devotion
 The yoke of 'Accursed' was placed around his neck.

Since man is meant to be tested in this world there is no respite for an afflicted person from the grief and sorrow of the world. Heedlessness strikes at this Way. What should you do? In this context it has been said:

Man is not meant to live without sorrow:
 Man alone it is who gets stuck in mud.
 Rejoicing is unknown to the people of this age:
 Man is himself all sorrow right from the womb.

O brother, man is an animal that drinks blood in the belly of his caring mother. When he leaves this place and enters the world which is the abode of calamity, what does he experience? While he is here, to the extent that it is possible, the sorrow and pain of his end form his lot. He also has to endure a broken heart. Neither is there any chance of not experiencing grief and regret. Fear and hope must also be experienced. On the other hand, he should have nothing to do with the pleasures and desires of his selfish soul.

As long as your infidel soul lies in ambush
 Where are you? Religion provides a guide.

O brother, the infidel soul is found in the very nature of man. It eagerly seeks the goods of this world. Don't trust it for any reason at all, or it will destroy you!

When your infidel soul is brought wholly under your control,
Your faith will become perfect, even if you had none before.

A real man is not one who fights other men and overcomes them. A real man is one who tames his infidel soul and overcomes it.

You don't become a man by fighting with others:
The man who struggles with himself is the real hero.

Letter 134 **WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE THE BELOVED**

If you are a man, eschew deceit:
Bypass opinion and seek Reality.
Let this be your asceticism, this your rule of life:
Let a sacred thread be the raiment of your body.

My very dear brother, Sheikh Sulaiman, may everlasting grace be yours! Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines. Read them carefully. You should be convinced, brother, that Master Abu Ali Daqqaq³⁹⁴ used to say: "There is no room in our hearts for either heaven or hell."

They are troubled by neither hell nor heaven:
The members of this group are formed in such a way.

O brother, for those seeking Him heaven and hell are considered as nothing. They have begun to travel the path of seeking.

For us there is no sorrow of hell or eagerness for heaven:
Remove Your veil, for we want to see Your face!

For example, if tomorrow hell is the appointed tent of meeting then, for those seeking Him the fire of hell will be made collyrium for their eyes. On the other hand if, even for a moment, they were to be afflicted in the highest heaven with His veiling, there would be such an outcry that even the inhabitants of hell would feel compassion for them.

They say that heaven is for guests:
Without seeing the Host, what is it?
When enemy and friend are both veiled,
Then what is the difference between them?

O brother, the holy and privileged angels were addressed thus: "They are honoured servants" (Q21:26) has become their stage, but "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54) was deemed applicable to a handful of dust. "Such is the grace of God which He bestows upon anyone He wishes" (Q57:21) fits in here. Inevitably one has to bid adieu to intellect and replace it with intoxication and madness.

The is the way of the Path, not the domain of intellect;
 Love pertains to dust and opinion to intellect.
 The angels are not aware of the secret:
 O clueless intellect, what place is there for you?

Thus it is said among the members of this group that "Love is the Path; the face of the Beloved is paradise; but separation is hell and torment."

The pain of love appeared as salve for every heart:
 No difficulty was ever solved without love.
 For intelligent people the Law is irksome:
 Love comes to hearts that are betrothed.

O brother, a saying describes the capacity of the intellect. It can't happen! Intellect cannot bear this load! "Love is a divine madness" explains it well.

As far as possible treat intellect with caution:
 Overcome intellect and become a madman.
 If you come to Me as an intelligent person
 You will be severely wounded by My love.
 But if you come to Me as a madman,
 No one will have any influence over you.

You must have heard of those who swept libraries clean of books, turned into madmen and abandoned everything they possessed! Their behaviour stems from this, as has been said:

In our quest for the Friend we have become men:
 Our first step was away from our own existence.
 He pays no attention to knowledge, so our lips were sealed:
 He gives nothing for intellect, so we became madmen.

Letter 135

BEING A SERVANT AND BEARING TRIALS

Dear respected and influential brother, Malik Mu'izuddin, very dear to God, special prayers and greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Khwaja Qabul brought your letter, brother. I have read it. He also told me about what was happening to you. O brother, being a servant involves different states, sometimes agreeable, but sometimes not. According to the wish of the Lord – may He be glorified and exalted – when things are agreeable He is looking for gratitude from His servant; and when they are disagreeable, He is looking for patience from him.

At His good pleasure nobodies became important people:
 He sought only gratitude and patience from His servants.

With regard to these two different states the Apostle, while at prayer, presented this petition: "My God, I want to have plenty to eat one day, and go hungry the next, so that I may give thanks when I am full, and be patient when I am hungry. In this way my state of being a servant will be complete." This is because faith has two equal parts, one of which is gratitude, while the other is

patience. A hint about this is contained in these words:

Turn towards the divine threshold, but don't use force:
By crying for help you become a man along this Way.

O brother, in these two different states – which are continually changing for a servant – are found secrets and much wisdom, as someone has well put it:

All this pain and happiness people experience
Contains within itself a secret concerning God.

Nowadays what do you see? When we get what we want, we fail to give thanks, and when we don't, we are impatient. What does it mean to be a Muslim, and what are we? It is all a matter of words and dress! It has rightly been expressed thus:

O seeker, if being a Muslim were easy,
Everyone would become like Shibli.
Until you become a Muslim from within,
How can you become one exteriorly?

All the hypocrites claimed to be Muslims and were dressed like Muslims. If by claiming to be Muslims and by being dressed like Muslims people become Muslims, then all the hypocrites were Muslims. It has been put thus:

As long as your heart is attached to the world
The Path to God lies hidden from your eyes.
Whoever is blind to God in this world
Will remain blind to God in the next.
We seek God while we are in this world:
This is our idea, absurdity and madness!
You cannot put these two together:
No one can acquire both this and That,

This is a long story. If it were to be written down it would occupy many volumes, each containing many sections, in order to include everything. That defeats the purpose. Brother, this is where your story fits in.

O brother, since the world is the abode of trials, who can swallow a morsel in it without trials? How can you expect a moment's enjoyment therein? How can there be a single moment without grief therein? Finally, brother, you will have heard that its cup is not filled with anything except a pile of rubbish. It is nothing but a waste area full of flies. It contains no joy unaccompanied by grief. In a similar fashion this analogy can be applied to other things. Thus it has been said:

Don't even sip from its cup, for it is full of poison:
Don't smell its roses and leaves, for they conceal thorns.
A contentious age keeps faith with no one:
We have seen, felt and heard about its burdens.

Brother, you are experiencing trials with regard to your house and goods, wife and children, as well as in making arrangements for relatives and servants. What should be done? Compose yourself. All works have their determined times – God willing – for your guidance and welfare, brother! In a little while God Most Exalted – to Whom be praise – will appear and bring your trials to a good end by His grace and favour. Peace!

Letter 136

DIVINE UNICITY AND THE QUALITY OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN ONE GOD

In duality the intellect is truly perplexed:
 The eyes of faith see nothing of duality.
 Grasp that duality implies an effort to discern:
 In unicity there is One, and nothing else.

O brother, since there is no multiplicity in the world of divine unicity, neither is there any distress or distinction. There has to be two for distinction, but asserting duality in the world of unicity would mean associating another with God.

You spoke at length about the Way, and in reply
 He said: "You make of it a partner! Take care!"

O brother, there are people in this group who have passed beyond the veil and have reached the stage of contemplating God. They know and see Him with certain knowledge and perceive God's existence as that which is truly real.

Whoever lays claim to existence
 Clearly indulges in idol-worship.

For this reason this group speaks of believers in One God as those people who take note of nothing other than God. "Everything is transitory except His face" (Q28:88) has been revealed to them.

There cannot be another as well as God:
 Door, keeper and guard are but nothing.

This is confirmed in the *Ihya Ulum* when the Apostle said: "The truest thing said by an Arab was said by Labid."³⁹⁵

Everything apart from God is naught:
 All blessings undoubtedly pass away.

Members of this group have reached the unfathomable depths of the ocean of divine unicity, having passed beyond the darkness of appearances, and have witnessed what is hidden from ordinary people. They have perceived all those things that others have only heard about.

Which heart knows His secrets even momentarily?
 Which ear has heard His speech even fleetingly?
 The Beloved reveals His beauty night and day:
 Where are the eyes that feast upon His sight?

Here the secret of divine unicity and the mystical knowledge of great men – as people call them – and their transformation and nothingness, "on account of seeing their natures," become known. It has been put thus:

All these colours are filled with deception:
 The wine of unicity makes all colours one.

It is said that when a seeker reaches this stage the Resurrection has arrived and the earth is transformed. The heavens are in turmoil, and God – may He be honoured and glorified – becomes manifest. The Honoured and Glorious Lord is himself fully manifest – but the seeker has been preoccupied with his own being! He emerges from that preoccupation with self and perceives the existence of God's being – may He be honoured and glorified – and utters these words in an ecstatic state:

I was gazing at the Beloved, but didn't know it:
 He was there with me, but I didn't know it.
 I said: "Seek Him," but I had already arrived!
 Self distracted me from Him, but I didn't know it.

Since you have become aware of this secret you shouldn't be trying to perform a whole lot of extra prayers and do a lot of extra fasting. On the contrary, your whole effort should be directed towards how you can remove the veil of this preoccupation with self.

In so far as you have distracted you have twisted:
 Since you have being, you are your own veil.

Realize that the setting-aside of this worthless veil and curtain is by virtue of your state of being a seeker. It is a duty incumbent upon you. Thus it is said:

If you are thinking about our Beloved in an idol-temple
 It would be a fault to journey far to walk around the Ka'ba.
 If the Ka'ba has no fragrance from Him, it is a fire-temple:
 The fragrance of union with Him makes a fire-temple our Ka'ba.

As you have heard, some members of this group have done certain things which it is not allowed to make public. They have taken place in this situation. Ordinary people have no knowledge of this secret. All this is correctly expressed as "between him and God." The secret has been expressed thus:

We attend to neither the exterior nor what is said:
 We take note of what is internal and experienced.

It is also expressed thus:

Once again my guide exchanged a robe for a sacred thread:
 He took the merit of ninety years and gave it to unbelievers.
 Setting aside asceticism he set out on the Qalandars' path:
 For every bottle of wine he gives a robe and a turban.
 He changed the direction of prayer and haunted a temple:
 He turned towards the Beloved, becoming His friend again.

Keep this letter away from those who talk foolishly and children at the breast so that you yourself are not polluted by such an exchange, but do not conceal it from people of perception. Just as it is not proper to show it to the former, it is equally inappropriate not to show it to the latter.

Food which is given to those pure ones
 Is not at all appropriate for the immature.

If those unfortunate ones were one day to experience a share of the wealth that is bestowed upon this group they would themselves know what 'work' really is. The 'work' pertains to what is prohibited and unseen.

If one day you are borne to this field
 You will see what is written about real men.
 The loving glance, filled with a thousand meanings,
 You will see, understand and hold unshakably.

O brother, this morsel cannot be contained within intellect's gullet. If the work of anyone is concerned with what lies beyond the intellect a veil can be discreetly drawn around these secrets.

Friends, speaking about love is an exalted discourse:
 Being denigrated because of love is to be revered.
 In intellect we become one, yet the work remains:
 Leaving intellect behind is a high stage indeed.

Also:

Man is not meant to be without grief:
 No one else except man has his feet in the mud.
 Joy has become a stranger to the people of this age:
 Man is himself the abode of grief.

Letter 137

SEEKING FORGIVENESS FROM THE GREAT BESTOWER OF FORGIVENESS

Brother Shamsuddin, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneril O brother, the lord of the Law issued this decree: "If anyone is guilty of many sins he should earnestly seek forgiveness. This is because the Holy One who sent me with the truth forgives sins in the very same way that a fire consumes wood." He also said: "Whoever seeks forgiveness will not persevere in sin, even though he sins seventy times in a day." Dear friend, remaining unsullied by sin from the first moment of their creation to the last pertains to angels, and remaining contaminated by sin from the first moment of their creation to the last pertains to devils. Falling into sin, however, and rising out of sin, pertains to Adam and his progeny. When man sinned, he fell, and when he repented, he emerged from sin. When this happened he received this robe: "The sinner who repents is like a person who hasn't sinned." Dear friend, it is not astonishing that man sins, for a hundred kinds of desires and appetites have been kneaded into his composition. From him repentance is astonishing. In this vein it has been said:

Whoever turns meek before his selfish soul
 Becomes a heretic like those without faith.
 Be courageous! Strike the neck of this soul,
 Even though it is entrenched within you.

Glory be to God! Behold a stage like heaven and a servant like Adam, and this one prohibition: "Do not come near this tree" (Q2:35). He was also endowed with the crown of prophethood and the throne of being God's representative. Nevertheless he did not remain safe. He fell, yet he got up and said: "O Lord, we have harmed ourselves" (Q7:23). Nowadays, granted that the world is an abode full of calamities, if Adam's descendants, sorely tried by so many injunctions and prohibitions, and with an adversary like Satan hot on the trail, not to mention an enemy like one's selfish soul lurking inside a person, it would be an astonishing feat not to commit sin!

As long as your selfish soul lies ready to pounce on you,
 What path should you follow? The path of religion!
 Asceticism brings the selfish soul to heel:
 There simply is no other way. Peace be to you!

When someone falls, however, he shouldn't remain lying on the ground. He shuld get up immediately, not like that Accursed One who fell and didn't get up. Inevitably he was branded with "My curse shall remain on you until the Day of Reckoning" (Q38:78). Even though he was eminent in the angelic world and had accumulated the wealth of 700,000 years of devotion, nevertheless he threw dust on his head and said:

In both worlds, from the heights to the depths,
 Nowhere at all have I not prostrated.
 Suddenly a challenge arrived like a flood:
 On that blood-drenched night I became accursed.
 From head to toe I was filled with grief,
 Weeping profoundly throughout the universe.
 What do I know, for I am a stranger?
 They are intelligent, but I am deranged.

O brother, since it is so dangerous to remain lying on the ground, you should be alert and continuously be asking for pardon. It has been put thus:

You are forever scratching and scraping along this Way:
 Till the moment of death you can never let up.
 A master of the heart does whatever God commands:
 He sacrifices his selfish soul along the Way to God.

It is related in the *Commentary* of Imam Zahid that this community feels at peace on two counts: one has gone away, while the other remains. The one that has gone away is the Apostle, while the one remaining is the seeking of forgiveness. In this context it is related how, when anyone would ask Khwaja Hasan Basri for assistance in some important affair or need of his he used to say, "Seek forgiveness wholeheartedly!" If anyone complained about the paucity of his income, poverty and want, he used to say the very same thing: "Seek forgiveness wholeheartedly!" The Glorious Book contains this command: "Seek forgiveness from God! God is Forgiving, Merciful" (Q73:20).

You old sinner, the door of repentance lies open:
 Many kinds of blessings are stored up for you.

Hasten towards repentance for, in this world,
Much can happen between starting and completing.

O brother, the Lord of eternity is such that even those preserved from sin, having been crowned with sinlessness, continually seek pardon. You must have heard that the Apostle used to seek forgiveness seventy times each day. When this verse was revealed, "Seek forgiveness for your sin and for the believers" (Q47:19), he increased it from seventy to a hundred times. There is a profound mystery here.

O brother, magnificence is an attribute of the Lord, while lowness pertains to servants. Just as the Lord should be praised for His magnificence, so a servant should be known for his lowness. The following alludes to this:

Everyone who humbles himself
In His eyes becomes a friend.
A lover, exalting the glory of the Beloved,
Is humble, in this world and the next.

Letter 138

SEEKING THE LORD CONTINUOUSLY, BY NIGHT AND DAY

What does existence mean if Sa'di dares not love?
What a pity it would be to pass his life in frivolity!

Brother Shamsuddin, special greetings and prayers from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! O brother, in whatever state you find yourself or whatever work you are engaged in, you should never be free of this care and this quest, for grace is not constricted. This whole enterprise depends on grace, so what scope is there for being without hope?

When He admits His friend to His very own world
Without his having worked, of what use is work?

If an externalist were involved in external affairs he would be polluted according to the command to seek the truth. What sort of purity of heart would this be? There should be nothing in the heart apart from God for, except for God, there should not be anyone else in the heart.

The heart should be empty of all except One,
Whereas it befits a house to hold a thousand.

Steadfastness is required to remain pure and not become polluted by the world. What is more, the heart in quest of God will continually be broken. Nothing which is broken is of any value except the heart, and the more broken it is, the more valuable it is. The prophet Moses used to pray thus to God: "My God, where should I look for You?" The command came: "Close to hearts broken for My sake." He said: "My God, there is no heart more broken than mine." The command came: "Then seek Me there!" The following alludes to this:

The world turns in prayer towards the beauty of my face:
The Master of the World is found in my hapless heart.

This is not to be construed as meaning transmigration or identity of being, as has been said:

You are in my soul in a very real sense:
Since I have found You, why do I seek You?

O brother, you must have heard, "The heart of a believer is the throne of God." Since the heart of a believer is the throne of the Lord, "The Merciful is established on the throne" (Q20:5) has been granted to him and this wealth has been bestowed upon him:

For others, the promise of union refers to tomorrow:
For lovers, the promise of union finds fruition today.

And this royal edict has been assigned to his name:

Whatever happens to a slave in the secrecy of love
Remains forever concealed, but is yet alive.

O brother, the Way is clear and the work known. If a person remains within the veil of self it will be to his own detriment.

What you have diminished you have distorted:
'You' exists within you and proves a veil for you.

The reality of man, who is a manifestation of the Divinity, is that he is the choicest of all creatures and is a world-revealing mirror, not simply this dust and water which can be experienced externally.

Man is not made of dust and water:
Man has a head, stature and a pure soul.
Countless thousands of angels were existing
Yet, finally, they prostrated before this mixture.

What could be clearer than this? Why did a world full of pure, holy angels prostrate before polluted dust? And why was dust a vicegerent? "This is a great secret. It is not proper to reveal it."

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
They are trying to erase 'self' from their innermost hearts.
With each breath they quaff wine proffered by their Friend:
They risk their lives, yet keep concealed the secret divine.

Concerning this exquisite secret God has given this sign in His own Book: "Say: 'The Spirit acts according to my Lord's command'" (Q17:85). From the purified lips of the lord of the world, throwing a certain amount of light on this secret, came: "God created Adam according to His own likeness." Imam Ghazali says "i.e. according to His quality." Khwaja Attar describes the quality of this secret thus:

There is no other creature more exalted than you:
Outside of you there is no other beloved.
Since you are beyond intellect and knowledge
You cannot be explained or described.

Whatever is found in Absolute Unicity
Has also been found confirmed in you.

Thus you will realize the truth of the saying that the Way to God Most Glorified and Exalted is not in heaven or on earth, nor is it in the east or the west, but it is found within a person. It has been put thus:

Until the soul of Adam was made manifest,
No one knew the Way to God.
The Way appeared when Adam appeared:
In him the key to both worlds appeared.

God willing, through careful reading, may the meaning of this letter be revealed to your heart, O brother, and may you one day experience it yourself! Why should this be astonishing? Shah Shuja' Kirmani, although he wore a robe and headgear, yet did he attain to the perfection which thousands of other seekers did?

Letter 139

THE SIN OF MAN COMPARED TO THE MERCY OF GOD

If some drops of sin were to appear,
Who would see them in such an Ocean?

Khwaja Ahmad, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Study them and rest assured that the sin and disobedience of the whole world would simply be a drop in that Ocean of mercy and forgiveness. What would your sin and mine be in that all-embracing Ocean? It has been put thus:

If the sins of all, from the first to the last,
Were piled up in heaven and upon the earth:
Yet the vast dimensions of all those sins
Are all obliterated in one Dwelling-place.

Finally there is an injunction of the Law where the Prophet says: "By God, in whose power is my soul, if you hadn't sinned, the Lord would assuredly have taken you away and brought another people in your place who would have sinned. They would have then craved forgiveness and God Most Exalted would have forgiven them." Thus it is said:

Sinners sought Your comprehensive forgiveness:
This is why I took hold of sinners' square.
When I saw Your work of veiling sins,
With my own hands I tore away my own veil.
Since the colour of the blanket I received was black,
O Gracious One, make it as white as my hair!

O brother, a profound secret lies hidden within your sins and mine. If your sins and mine didn't exist, the divine pardoning and veiling would not have been

revealed, i.e. the effect of pardoning and veiling would not have been made manifest.

All this pain and happiness people experience
 Contains within itself a secret concerning God.
 Plumbing divine secrets is the work of the devout:
 How could common people know or grasp it?

A holy man used to say that the Lord has two treasures. One is full of merit and generosity while the other is full of forgiveness and pardon. If a believer has been devout and refrained from committing sins, merit and generosity are showered upon him. If he were not to sin, and no sin could be attributed to him, then the treasury of forgiveness and pardon would remain untapped.

Who does not know about the way You work?
 Who is not afraid of Your untrammelled power?
 If You accept us, O Unswayed by causes,
 What if a handful of dust is good or ugly?

O brother, wherever there is acceptance faults vanish. When the angels said, "Will You put there one who will do evil" (Q2:30), God Most Glorious and Exalted did not reply that they would not do evil but said, "I know what you do not know" (Q2:30). The secrets of My divinity have not been made manifest to you, nor are you aware of the kindnesses bequeathed to men from My inexhaustible being. If they are not worthy, I make them worthy. If they are far off, I bring them close. If they are contemptible, I make them dear. You may look at their external iniquities, but I look at their internal purity. If you rely on your own sinless state, they rely on My mercy. Of what worth is your sinless state if it is not accepted by Me? What harm can result from their sins when they have been erased by Me?"

We are not beggars since the king of love,
 By Your goodness, has become our king.
 Last night, in a trance, we heard a Call:
 In both worlds Your pain is our medicine.

All these graces and favours are caresses and intimate encounters with the Lord, but a servant should always remain within the bond of his servitude. He should be repenting of his sins continuously, for His presence is such that devout people repent of their own devotion. In this connection it has been related that the Apostle used to beg pardon a hundred times a day. We know that the garment of prophethood is unstained, for the tiniest particle of sin is not found thereon. Nevertheless there was seeking pardon for one's devotion.

Don't even steal a glance at your own existence,
 For you won't become bright and radiant thereby.
 Be overwhelmed at God's threshold! Don't deceive,
 For humility makes a man of you along this Way.

Letter 140

ALERTING THE SEEKER ABOUT FALLING INTO DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Why should I not see Your beauty seen by a hundred worlds?
 Why should I not have news of You when many others have?
 Why should I not be united to You, O Hidden from every gaze?
 In paradise maidens and streams will be forever scattered!

I have read all your news, brother.³⁹⁶ Qazi Zahid was here. He also read your letter. O brother, stay alert so that your heart may not be smitten! If anyone tarries in these spectacles and visions, "Have you noticed those who have made gods of their desires" confronts him and he gets caught up in the circle of 'no'³⁹⁷ and gets stuck as the gatekeeper of "but God." Do you know who the gatekeeper of "but God" is? He is the one who is called Satan. What more can be said about him!

The Beloved said to me: "Sit at My door!
 Let no one in who knows not My secret!"

O brother, after severing the last ties with the spectacle of the invisible world the Way is still cut off for many people. Their vision is so truncated that it appears to them that the work lies fully revealed to them and that they have attained the Goal of the Way. Alas, "what is dust and what is the Lord of lords?" This is what a dear one has said:

Sometimes my heart has thrown my goods in a Place
 Towards which a hundred guides know not the way.
 Two thousand lovers like me have been slain
 In a month, yet not a sigh has escaped our lips!

O brother, those steadfast ones and those endowed with intimate knowledge have corrected this tablet in the school of "his gaze did not falter nor was it turned aside" (Q53:17). Neither the visible world nor the invisible one is capable of satisfying them.

Steadfastness abides in the world of holiness:
 How could even Gabriel set foot therein?

Praise be to God! Take a look at the work of the leader of the rejected ones and listen to what is found in "Provisions for Souls": Wahb bin Munabbih³⁹⁸ said: "In some earlier books I saw that the Devil had met Moses near Mount Sinai. Moses said to the Devil: 'What have you done by not prostrating before Adam?' The Devil replied: 'I did not want to disavow my claim. I would then become like you. I had claimed to love Him. That is why I prostrated before no one else. I was severely punished for this and accept the punishment. You claimed to love Him. He commanded you to look towards the mountain. If it stayed in its own place, then you would shortly see Him just as you saw it. If you were to lower your gaze from the mountain, then you would certainly see Him."

For committed lovers there are both secrets and works here as Ain ul-Quzat

says: "What do you know about who the Devil is? Gabriel ought to steal a glance at what he did!" It has been expressed thus:

It is dangerous on this Path to prostrate before any but Him:
If you are a man of His Path beware of anything less than Him!

Once it happened that a devotee became enamoured of his own heart. He heard these words within himself: "O deceitful boaster, are you seeking your own heart or Me?" The following words hint at this:

If the eight heavens are made fully yours,
Don't rest content with them: press on!
Be utterly steadfast and bind your heart to God!
Fly higher even than the fabled Huma bird!

In eighteen thousand worlds no group has been created of greater steadfastness than men.

Here neither heaven nor hell has any value:
Whatever you know simply serves to veil Me.

O brother, the one who said, "The person who does not see takes delight in signs," spoke aptly of occasions when the Beloved seems to be concealed. When the Beloved is not concealed, however, looking at signs would be torment!

When we saw Joseph present before us,
What need was there for any other bond?

The wonders of the world of love are not comprehensible to the intellect. A devotee of love is a Muslim. When the messenger Joseph went away, the eyesight of the messenger Jacob was also lost. As long as he did not see him, neither did his brothers see him. When the messenger Joseph returned, so did his eyesight.

Whoever has not experienced the loss of Joseph,
Even though he believes, hasn't really believed.

O brother, in the state of love much is made comprehensible, especially of things beyond the grasp of the intellect. Its inability to comprehend those things is like a defective ability to grasp what can be understood.

This Sufi Path is not traversed by the intellect:
Dust depends on the intellect, but walks in love.
There is a mystery of which the angels have no knowledge:
O intelligent one without understanding, where is intellect?

When seekers reach "a craving for God," their spirits will be raised "from the lowest depths to the most sublime heights." All the inner meanings and refinements of that condition will be revealed without anything being written or spoken.

O souls, speaking about love is high discourse indeed:
It is a high honour to be spoken ill of on account of love.
Intellect drags us down and the work is not accomplished:
Leaving intellect behind is a high station indeed.

"O God, from Your bountiful mercy give us and all seekers our daily bread,
O Most Compassionate One!"

The pain of love came, balm for every heart:
No problem was ever solved without love.

Letter 141

ABANDONING THE WORLD AND TURNING ONE'S GAZE TOWARDS THE LIFE TO COME

Make an effort to accept restrictions for two or three days,
So that you may the better die to death for two or three days.
The world is an old woman, so what will happen if you fail
To show an old woman affection for two or three days?

Prayerful greetings from the author of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Read them carefully. O brother, you must have heard: "Live in the world like a stranger or as a wayfarer, and consider yourself as a companion of the dead." This is a saying from the assembly of the Apostle and all have faith in his sayings. This would be the hallmark of what it means to be a Muslim living in the world, not the behaviour of those who imitate Pharaoh or Nimrod by rejoicing in the pleasures and blessings of a few days in this world, which is simply coloured dust and a foolish picture, a fraud!

This kebab, this wine and this sugar
Are coloured dust or a picture, my son.

They grow proud and arrogant and say: "We belong to the community of Muhammad!"

If you are comfortable with glorification throughout your life,
You will spend your days enjoying this world's delights.
Yet finally death will come, and that is when
You will dream about what you have seen in life.

Since people are enamoured of possessions and prominent positions, which are idols and veritable death-dealing devils, they consider all the drawbacks of wealth as virtues, while all the virtues of poverty, which adorned the prophets and made manifest the saints, are accounted as defects. This was the very religion of Pharaoh and Nimrod. Pharaoh found fault with the messenger Moses for his penury, while Nimrod oppressed Abraham, the Friend of God, on account of his poverty. It will not be surprising if all those who follow their religion in this world lament on the Day of Resurrection. "Whoever behaves like a group of people becomes one of them" is how the Law puts it.

Whatever is important for you in this world
Is what you will be united to for all eternity.

It has been said that whoever is endowed with intelligence makes use of

the world, while whoever is devoid of intelligence is devoured by the world. It is related that Moses, that excellent man, saw the world as an old woman wearing brightly coloured clothes and adorned with many kinds of ornaments. All bedecked in this fashion she seemed to be young. Moses said: "O faithless old woman, what have you done with your husbands?" She replied: "O Moses, those who recognized me, divorced me and did away with me, while I myself divorced and devoured those who did not recognize me." It has been expressed thus:

Love of this world means perpetually adoring
Gold and silver, slave-girls and slaves.
When rich foods and sweets are the focus of one's life,
A careless drunkard lives enmeshed by them.
This cannot be reconciled with the love of God:
For this reason the prophets have abandoned it.
You seek both God and this base world:
This is a dream, deceit and madness.

It is mentioned in some books that, when the Devil was expelled from paradise, he became sad, but when the world was assigned to him, he became happy and said: "My God, grant me gifts and snares so that I may carry off from the Path whoever falls into my snare." The Lord gave him gifts and snares. He joyfully clapped his hands and began to dance, saying: "Then, by Your might, I'll seduce all men except those who worship You sincerely" (Q38:82-3).

This old woman of a world winks at you, but,
In the eyes of mystics, she is utterly wearisome.
Look at the state of her outstanding citizens!
How can whoever knows her be enamoured of her?

Letter 142

SEEKING GOD AND ABANDONING OURSELVES ON THE WAY TO GOD

Whoever showed steadfastness became a man,
Like the sun, standing alone above the rest.
If the eight heavens are entirely bequeathed to you,
Don't be content with them! Pass on beyond them!
No matter how enticing paradise seems to you,
Be firmly resolute and pass beyond it as well.

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Study what has been written and be convinced, dear brother, that, according to the injunctions of the Law, the world is the way and paradise is what is sought. According to the imperatives of reality, however, paradise is the way and God is what is sought. In the Torah it is written: "O David, wherever you see one of My seekers, become his servant."

Wherever you see a man of God then, for your soul,
 Hasten to make collyrium of the dust beneath his feet.
 Become dust beneath the feet of those travelling this Path
 In order to attain nearness to the Almighty.

The Lord's idea of steadfastness is like this. If the realm of Solomon is apportioned to someone and he casts a glance towards it, then he will not be counted as a steadfast person. This is why a holy man has said: "The Lord has placed a bow in the hands of lowly dust which neither dominion nor the heavens can string."

In very truth the revolving heavens
 Cannot string my bow, O my son.

This wealth has been bestowed upon lowly dust because eighteen thousand worlds have not produced a group of greater steadfastness than man.

Be resolute in steadfastness and bind your heart to God:
 Travel the Path more proudly than the Phoenix!

When dominion was offered to the Apostle he said: "I am a servant who goes hungry one day and eats one day." This rests on steadfastness.

Your stage of steadfastness touches the world of holiness:
 How could Gabriel dare to venture there?

On the night of ascent whatever was contained in this world or the angelic world was, in his blessed sight, not even seen out of the corner of his eyes. This was steadfastness!

Whoever enters steadfastly upon this Path,
 Even if he is a beggar, becomes a king.

When Adam sold the eight heavens for a single grain of wheat, that was steadfastness!

When Adam's soul was inflamed with the spirit of poverty,
 He sold the eight heavens for a grain of wheat.

O brother, whatever comes under the sway of "Be!" and bears the mark of creatureliness, has come down. Real men do not aspire to any such thing, even if it be as exalted as paradise.

Be united to God and distrustful of self:
 "He does not know them" is their sign.
 They are not worried about hell or heaven:
 This group has been purified in this fashion.

O brother, the reality of man, who is a manifestation of the divine mystery, has his worth expressed thus: "And I have breathed into him of My spirit" (Q15:29). "He loves them and they love Him" (Q5:54) is his robe of honour and dignity. He is holy and purified, even though made of water and dust.

Man is not simply water mingled with dust:
 He has a head and body, plus a pure soul.
 A hundred worlds full of pure angels existed:
 How did they come to prostrate before water?

What is made clear by this? A world filled with holy and pure angels bows down in prostration before dust, and dust becomes a vicegerent. "This is a great secret which it is not fitting to disclose."

Do you know why the pure ones are silent?
 They strive to erase self from their innermost hearts.
 At every breath they quaff wine proffered by the Friend:
 They play with their heads yet hide the divine secrets.

The Glorious Book itself gives this indication of that sublime secret: "Say: 'The Spirit is by my Lord's command'" (Q17:85). From the pure tongue of the lord of the Day of Judgement this much of the well-guarded secret has been revealed: "God created Adam according to His likeness." Imam Ghazali used to say: "According to His attribute." Khwaja Attar has given this hint concerning that secret:

There is no other creature more exalted than you:
 There is none, apart from you, who is more loved.
 Since you are beyond intellect or knowledge,
 You are not contained in a commentary or quality.
 Whoever has entered unconditioned Unicity,
 Has been entirely, in you, an investigator of reality.

O brother, you must have heard that "The heart of a believer is the throne of God Most Exalted." Since this is so, without doubt the secret of the Merciful One is established upon the throne. This is ready cash for him.

Until Adam's soul became enlightened,
 No one knew the Path to the Omnipotent.
 The Path appeared when Adam appeared:
 With him appeared the key to both worlds.

"I was a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered" is a mirror reflecting this very Adam. "Whoever knows himself also knows his Lord" expresses the inner meaning of this.

I expelled Adam from the garden
 And displayed My beauty in the wilderness.

It has come to my ears, brother, that you have an abundance of talent and intellectual acumen, as well as firm steadfastness. God willing, by studying this letter, may its meaning be made clear to your heart and, one day, may you do what you really want to. Why should this be astonishing? Shah Shuja Kirmani wore a dervish cap and robe and had attained such perfection that thousands of seekers thronged to see him. Did any of them attain that perfection? Muhammad Ma'shuq wore a dervish robe. A dear friend used to say: "Tomorrow, on the Day of Resurrection, the desire of the righteous ones will be this: 'O that I were dirt

upon the face of the earth so that Muhammad Ma'shuq might place his foot upon that dust!" O brother, since this work depends upon grace, it is not beyond your reach.

Whatever He gives to His friend bears fruit within him:
Without the effect of His work, of what use is exertion?

Nevertheless, you should exert yourself so that you may ascertain the truth through service.

Although wealth is bestowed without a cause,
Devotion to God is the work of a man of wealth.
May both your end and reward be favourable!
May it prove so, O Lord of the worlds! Peace!

Letter 143

SHOWING PREFERENCE FOR ASSOCIATING WITH SCHOLARS OF THE WORLD TO COME

Whoever enters upon this Path with a steadfast mind,
Even if he be a beggar, will turn out to be a king.
A mean-spirited dog is on the lookout for bones,
While a lion's claws seek living marrow.

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Dear friend, read carefully what I have written. Briefly, since Qazi Zainuddin³⁹⁹ has given a full account of how you are faring, you should rest assured that it has been received by me. Travelling the Path, however, is up to you, since you have donned the cap of the sheikhs. You need to break the idol of custom; cut the thread of habit; and set out with a sincere heart. You should be stout-hearted in your quest for Reality, for a disciple will reach nowhere unless he is resolute.

Every stout-hearted beginner turned out to be a man,
Standing alone, like the sun, high above all others.
Be unflinchingly resolute and bind your heart to God:
You are as high as the Phoenix, but go up higher!

What is more, dear friend, this knowledge pertains to the Sufis who are the scholars of the life to come. "Scholars are the heirs of the prophets" describes the dignity of their vicegerency. It is experienced by associating with them and serving them.

May their fragrance be a touch of gold for you!
May this perception enlighten you along the Way!
Even if you seize a thorn, you will bloom:
A master of the heart will enlighten you.

On the other hand, by associating with worldly scholars this could never happen. There would be only custom and habit, and these constitute idol-worship, not the worship of God.

All this knowledge constitutes a trivial body:
 Knowing how to go to God is something else!
 An intermediary has arisen for this people:
 Whatever he says is undoubtedly true.
 Since he sees nothing except similitude,
 He speaks whatever he hears from Him.

Whoever resolutely tries to leave behind the worship of habit and whim and attain to the worship of God, experiences the pain of faith, and seeks the wealth of the company of this group, scholars of the life to come, honoured by "The scholars of my community are like the prophets of the sons of Israel," so that, day by day, by means of associating with them and by being of service to them, his reprehensible qualities may be transformed into laudable ones, and he may find release from the grip of his infidel soul, see the beauty of Islam, and thus arrive at peerless Oneness.

When reprehensible qualities have been transformed
 Every knotty problem which you have will be resolved.
 When your nothingness has been established
 The cry of "I am Reality" will arise.
 This is the goal of the Way:
 This is reality at its purist.
 Any desire which preceded this
 Was custom and habit, not faith.

Dear Friend, although this blessing and this wealth proceeds from the grace of the glorified and exalted Lord, a servant has no option but to stand firm in service and extricate himself from the calamities of the world and from the cravings and impulses of his selfish soul in order to be prepared for this blessing and this wealth.

If you have within you the desire for union,
 To see Beauty's radiance and comeliness:
 Eat less, sleep less and tame your body.
 Being inflamed with that desire and need
 Is better for you than water and mud
 To enter the Light of soul and heart.

Letter 144

THE QUALITIES OF MUSLIMS AND THE CONQUEST OF ONE'S SELFISH SOUL AND SATAN

If you are a Muslim, why are you unjust?
 Since you are unjust, how can you be a Muslim?
 You torment people with hand and tongue:
 You seek your own advantage, but harm others.
 O brother, being a Muslim doesn't mean this! The Law has summed it up

thus: "A Muslim is a person whose words and deeds enable his fellow-Muslims to remain at peace and untroubled." This is because the heart of a sincere believer is an abode of the love of God. It is reported that anyone who soils the heart of a believer would be soiling the abode of God. Whoever causes people trouble would be causing trouble for God.

God is averse to anyone who harms people:
 Don't give him the name 'believer' or call him one.
 May trouble-makers be held in low esteem:
 Don't consider troublesome people to be Muslims!

O brother, it is not easy to be a Muslim! There are many Muslims by name in the world, but those who are Muslims in reality are rare.

O seeker, if being a Muslim were easy,
 Everyone would be like Shibli or Adham.
 Until you become a Muslim from within,
 How can you appear to be a Muslim?

In the nature of man there is an infidel soul which hankers after the goods of this world and loves the pleasures and delights of the world. In this sense it is dead, no matter how much it appears to be alive.

No matter how smart and quick-witted the selfish soul is,
 Since it hankers after the world, realize that it is dead.

Its entire endeavour is to accumulate goods and acquire name and fame. The love of goods and fame inevitably leads a man astray, as happened to Nimrod and Pharaoh.

Since your infidel soul lies in ambush for you
 Where is your guide? Where you find faith!
 Because of this infidel within our very nature,
 Few Muslims indeed are found in this world.

But when you have decapitated this infidel soul with the sword of struggle and become free of its lusts and desires, and shown that you don't comply with its wishes, that is when you will see the face of a Muslim and will acquire the faith of those who believe in One God.

When your infidel soul is completely at your mercy,
 Even if you are full of infidelity, you will be filled with faith.

Saintly people say that an intrepid man is not the person who fights with others and overcomes them, or even attacks infidels and is victorious. A real man is one who smites his own selfish soul, for "the selfish soul is the greatest idol of all." Whoever sets out on the path of the love of God and claims to love God has to smash this idol into pieces and fight against it, for it will never accept peace.

Bravely scattering soldiers' ranks is easy:
 Real bravery lies in conquering oneself.

Letter 145**TRANSFORMATION AND PROGRESS**

O you who call upon God out of habit,
 Your witness is far from Reality.
 As long as you worship God only with your tongue,
 You are simply worshipping your own desires.

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneril Read them carefully. Your letter reached me. I read it carefully. O brother, realize there can be no progress without a total transformation and, without progress, there can be no attraction, or what some even call a craving. The tendency is towards "union with what one desires," as the sacred Law puts it. It is not something that can be accomplished between sunrise and breakfast! If you about what sort of work it is, it has been expressed thus:

Bind yourself to the stirrup of a guide
 To exclude the possibility of turning back.
 As long as you are led by your own habits
 You are a devil and a hypocrite, not a dervish.
 If you want to acquire what you seek,
 Seek a guide, O carefree young man!
 A guide along the Way is a philosopher's stone,
 His breast is a vast, green ocean.

Everyone for whom steadfastness means advancing from the worship of habit to the worship of God considers it incumbent upon himself, night and day, to seek the companionship of this group in order to be of service to its members. The aim of this companionship and service would be that, day by day, blameworthy qualities would be changed into praiseworthy ones; he would himself emerge from the veil of his infidel soul; see the beauty of divine Oneness; and become a genuine believer in One God.

When blameworthy qualities have been changed,
 All your problems will be solved.
 When your very nothingness becomes apparent,
 Everything will rise up and proclaim, "I am Reality!"
 Whatever desire preceded this stage
 Was simply custom or habit, not true faith.

Letter 146**ABANDONING POSSESSIONS AND LIVING LIKE A MUSLIM**

The slightest trace of God's pain in your heart
 Is better for you than acquiring both worlds.

Dearly beloved brother, Muhammad Diwana, prayerful greetings from the

writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Study them carefully. Listen to what this holy man has to say:

O haughty one, tell me what profit there is in this!
 A work on the tip of the tongue is not enough.
 As long as you worship God with tongue alone,
 It means you are worshipping your own desires.

O brother, if verbal faith sufficed for anyone to carry out this work, no hypocrite would be an unbeliever. Remain alert! Seek Reality! Pass beyond metaphor!

If you are a man, shun deceit!
 Seek Reality, not conjecture!
 Believing in One God is not for water and dust:
 It pertains to a clean heart and a pure soul.
 As long as breath remains doubts can arise:
 Faith is of the heart, but you have no heart!

O brother, although this work depends on grace, not on knowledge or activity on my part or yours, nevertheless we are called to serve and, to the extent that it is possible, we should exert ourselves to the utmost. "Seeking Reality is the task of His servants."

The work is not accomplished through effort and knowledge:
 Nothing happens except through the favour of the Eternal One.
 In spite of all that, keep up your own efforts:
 When grace is bestowed, your work will be done.

Being caught up in custom and habit is idol-worship, not Islam, for being a Muslim is one thing, while following custom and habit is something else.

O you who have begun to follow custom and habit,
 You are far from the quest of Reality.
 As long as your own habits are your guide,
 You are a devil or a hypocrite, not a dervish.

O brother, you have passed your life in vain activities and you are still doing the same. What is all this running around from east to west and from west to east? And what is the profit of suffering all this grief and anguish about this and that?

What is all this seeking from left to right?
 Your capital is gone, so what profit is this?
 O lost one, what have you done here or there?
 Make this your Path, if you are a man.
 Realize, my son, that without sorrow
 It is not possible to discover the Treasure.

Letter 147

HUMILITY AND QUALITIES OF HEART

In asceticism is found guidance towards Reality:
What is in love except wine or sacred thread?

My brother, Maulana Mahmud, "May God bless you along with the Prophet and his family!" After receiving prayerful salutations from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri, rest assured of my good opinion of you, since "you realize what it means to make a god of your desires" is a quality of yours. You have described the praise of those accepted by the Lord and near to Him. It involves exertion and encountering much pain. I have read all this carefully. Brother, by virtue of the beauty of your thought you are rewarded and recompensed therein. Nevertheless, O brother, "Something heard cannot be compared to something seen."

This dervish knows himself well, yet since "The good opinion of a believer is not mistaken" much hope has arisen and been blessed by this command: "I am close to the broken-hearted." This gift was bestowed by the Lord of contemplation, for a lover, being lost in the Beloved, and finding support in the qualities of the Beloved, arrives at the stage of "I was His ears, eyes, tongue and hands." Whatever he says comes from the tongue of the Beloved, and whatever he does, is done by the Beloved, as Maulana Rum says:

In the work you do, you do not come in between:
Know for certain that it has been done by God.

O brother, since you have no heart, pass beyond yourself and become joined to the Friend and filled with the qualities of the Beloved! The story of Laila and Majnun bears witness to this:

When Majnun passed beyond penury and abundance
That was when the bent of his heart became like gold.
He became Laila's intimate friend and gave preference to her:
Like a wild creature, he severed his affection for all others.

Congratulations for what has been apportioned to you, my brother, in this sense. May your current efforts along the Way prove fruitful due to your respect for the Prophet and his distinguished family! To sum up, O brother, "The heart of a believer is the throne of God." Along this Way, seek what you are seeking!

You are within my soul by way of meaning:
Since I have found You, why search for You?

A dear friend has also explained it thus:

Finally, where have you reached? Goodness?
Since It has not been lost, why search for It?

"He is with you wherever you are" is the cash in hand of all lovers.

For others, the promise of union pertains to tomorrow:
For lovers, the promise of union pertains to today.

O brother, you cannot travel along this Way with the provisions and capital of the intellect. Love, which is considered madness, constitutes the provisions and mount required for this Way. "Love is a divine madness" is bestowed upon the lover by the Beloved.

As far as possible, remain a stranger to intellect:
 Plunder your intellect and become a madman.
 If you rely on intellect in dealing with Me,
 You will receive many wounds in My lane.
 Yet, if you come as a madman,
 No one can do anything to you.

My brother, may this message be revealed to you in ever-increasing measure, to the praise of God,! There is hope that – God willing – your final end will be based on love and that you will be slain by God, as it has been said:

Intellect and commands have to be observed:
 Love and faith have to be tasted.
 He slays lovers at the very moment of joy,
 For He kills the best of them with His own hand.
 Whoever is killed along the Way to God
 Is killed by God, as he has been accepted.
 He takes half a life and gives a hundred:
 He bestows steadfastness where it is lacking.

Letter 148

SERVITUDE, PATIENCE AND GRATITUDE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

It is better for a servant to follow instructions
 And do whatever his Lord wants of him.
 Life has its allotted span which quickly passes by:
 Whether pleasantly or not, still it passes by.

Prayerful greetings, dear friend, from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Read them carefully. I have had a full report about you from Haji Samarqandi. O brother, servitude consists in nothing other than patience and gratitude. This itself is graciousness and generosity. This indicates how pleased He is with you and me, as has been said:

By His grace He has made nobodies important people:
 All He asked of His servants was patience and gratitude.

O brother, when a sore appears, so too does its remedy; and when a wound is inflicted, a dressing is provided.

When a wound is received from a blow of His,
 A soothing ointment is also provided.

If you had no wounds inflicted by Him,
Eternally you would have no hope of comfort.

Servitude and desire cannot be joined together. This idea should be banished from your heart! Prophets, saints, nobles and kings wanted so many things to happen but they didn't. Moreover, they didn't want some things to happen, but they did. Thus the following lament:

I do not find what I am continually seeking:
I am never free of this quest, not even for an instant.
I am helplessly torn between this and that:
As long as I have breath, I am distressed at heart.

A saintly man purchased a newly captured slave. He asked him what name he should call him. "What the lord wants." He asked what sort of food he should give him. "What the lord wants," he replied. "What sort of material do you want your clothes to be made of?" "What the lord wants," he replied. "What sort of work should I give you?" "What the lord wants," he replied. The saintly man said: "I have not purchased a slave. This is a master sent to teach me what servitude is."

Ask several people what servitude entails:
What is servitude if not casting aside?
If you feel consolation not approved by God,
It would not be consolation, but an affliction.

O brother, don't strive to obtain what you want today, but strive rather to ensure that His good pleasure is accomplished in you. When His good pleasure has been obtained, everything has been obtained. "Whoever has the Lord has everything" would become your wealth. It has been put thus:

In paradise the heavens are wholly unsatisfying:
In paradise it is like tasting the pangs of hell.
At Your door what is good or bad for me?
Because of You, what is paradise for me?

If you want to know whether God Most Exalted is pleased with you or not, the mystics have this to say: "Look at what you do! If all your work is devoted to Him, the Lord is pleased with you, for devotion is the sign of His good pleasure. On the other hand, if all your work is sinful, the Lord is not pleased with you, for sin is a sign of His displeasure. If there is a mixture, what predominates will prove indicative." How could you or me, or the likes of us, be so blessed that every act is one of devotion? At least devotion should predominate. And if – God forbid – we be overcome, let us perish as a result of torture and punishment, for everyone killed by torture and punishment is destroyed. It is not a path to liberation for you and me, or the likes of us. Nevertheless, let us strive to repent and seek refuge in God, for there is joy in repentance.

O hardened sinner, there is joy in repentance:
Many kinds of blessings lie in store for you.
Hasten towards repentance for, from mother earth,
Many things have taken birth and flourished.

Don't commit faults, but spend time in devotion:
All the things you need have been given to you.

O brother, since it is extremely difficult to emerge all of a sudden from worldly preoccupations, as far as possible and according to your strength, don't expect to be free of grieving and sorrowing , sighing and repenting. You should make excuses for what has been attained, since you have reached sixty or seventy years of age. As long as breath remains, strive to know yourself.

Work with all your strength as long as you live:
At death you won't be able to do anything at all.
Understand the age so that it may be easy for you:
Otherwise you will have much to trouble you.

Since the work has reached life's very end, your prayers of intercession should consist of asking forgiveness. At all times, but especially at night, you should constantly beg for forgiveness. It is related in a tradition that the Lord will make anyone who constantly seeks forgiveness free from grief and liberated from material constraints. One day the Lord will bless you in the place where doubt does not exist.

It is related in another tradition that when one of you sins much, it is sufficient to constantly beg for forgiveness from God Who sent to me the truth that forgiveness devours sin the same way that fire devours wood. It is also related how the Apostle, although adorned with the crown of prophethood and the cap of sinlessness, used to beg forgiveness seventy times a day. Finally he reached a hundred times.

It is mentioned in the *Commentary* of Imam Zahid that two graces were bestowed upon this community. One has been taken away, while one remains. The one that has been taken away was Muhammad, the Apostle of God, while the one that remains is forgiveness. It has been expressed thus:

As long as your infidel soul lies in ambush for you
Where are you? Faith will provide you with a guide.
Even though your selfish soul is intelligent and acute,
Yet its focus is the world, so consider it as dead!
The selfish soul is tamed by asceticism:
There is no other way! Peace be to you!

Concerning Khwaja Hasan of Basra it is related that whenever anyone came to him for help in some important matter, or had to ask for assistance because of being in dire straits, he used to say: "Constantly seek forgiveness!" If anyone complained about his straitened circumstances, he would say: "Constantly seek forgiveness!"

You were about to sin and He was ready to erase:
That is why I took hold of the field of sin.
When my blanket has been stained black,
Make it as white as my hair, O Bounteous One!
I am at Your door, a vessel without hope:
Graciously turn my blackness white!

Letter 149

PATIENCE: ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Man is not created to live without sorrow:
 None but man can get stuck in the mud.
 Joy does not come from one's kindred:
 A man experiences grief in his home.

Prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Sharaf Maneri! Read them and understand that Haji Samarcandi has given a full account of all that has taken place. Let it be accepted that man is an animal. He drinks blood in the womb of his own mother. When he emerges from there and falls into the abode of disaster, does he know what to eat?

O that my mother had never given birth to me,
 Unless I am able to slay my infidel soul!
 O that my name had never existed,
 And I knew naught of agitation or rest!
 Everyone who has to face this difficulty
 Should do what he can with all his heart.

When this comes to pass, however, what if it is easy or difficult? What if it is happiness or unhappiness? It is all the same.

This life of five or six days passes by,
 Whether happily or not, it passes by.
 Since life is like this, no matter how long,
 What is it, except a grasping at the wind?

In the meantime, as far as time allows, you should prepare for your own death and burial, and provisions should be laid up for your final journey. In addition, you should stay far away from foolish people.

Abandon the world and get ready for death:
 The Way is long, so make provision for it.
 Death is something fixed for all:
 All have to sleep at last in dust.

Night and day, for whatever length of life remains to you, beg forgiveness and repent and taste the sorrow of faith, and beg pardon for your past faults. Spend your nights in grieving, with a hundred tears and groans.

When my blanket has been stained black,
 Make it as white as my hair, O Bounteous One!
 O Creator, if I have become a creature of habit,
 For the last time I have borne witness to You.
 I am at Your door, a vessel without hope:
 Graciously turn my blackness white!
 Even if a few drops of sin were to appear,
 How could they be seen in such an Ocean?

Letter 150

SINCERITY OF HEART AND PURITY OF INTENTION

Do away with whatever pertains to the Way or to opinion,
 So that your heart becomes a place where God can dwell!
 Burn and plunder whatever is not God!
 Purify yourself of everything except faith!

O brother, if you are all taken up with worldly occupations externally, but are inwardly contaminated, what profit is there? The heart should be purified of worldly contamination, for God is glimpsed in the heart, not in clay. "God does not look at your faces, nor at your works, but at your hearts."

I don't attend to your tongue or words:
 I look within, to see your inner state.

You must have heard that "The heart is the abode of God." This is hinted at thus:

I am thirsty, yet kept away from the Ocean:
 I am seated on a Treasure, yet forced to beg.

O brother, the One sought by the worlds is clear and manifest to all. If anyone, by turning back, himself remains veiled, he will be disappointed concerning Him.

What you have lost you have distorted:
 You lurk within yourself, acting as a veil.

Glory be to God! What can be clearer than this saying: "And we are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (Q50:16). Whatever intellect gives shape to and takes note of and finds itself thinking about, the essence and attributes of the Lord of the worlds are exempt therefrom and holy. In spite of all this, He is closer to you than your jugular vein.

O you who died while trying to unravel the knot,
 Union brought life, and separation faded away.
 O you who died of thirst at the Ocean's edge!
 O you who died a beggar seated atop a Treasure!

O brother, human nature is a receptacle of hidden secrets, otherwise how could a handful of dust be of such worth that a world full of angels prostrated before him, a handful of clay? Where did this honour come from, that he became God's representative? "This is a great secret" was on the excellent tongue of the lord of the world. "He created Adam according to His likeness" gives a hint about that mind-boggling mystery. Imam Ghazali says: "O you in the likeness of His attribute!" Khwaja Attar has this to say about that secret:

Until the soul of Adam appeared,
 No one knew the Way to the Creator.
 The Way appeared when Adam did:
 With him came the key to both worlds.

Ears cannot bear more than this, nor is there any permission to describe or write about it. Pass on, so that we may pass on! You must surely have heard:

If, intoxicated, you betray the secret of His love,
The punishment is death, according to this group.

Concealment and silence are necessary. It is proper only to hint, or make brief allusions.

Do you know the reason why the pure ones are so silent?
In their innermost hearts their self-effacement is complete.
At every breath they drink wine proffered by the Friend:
They play with their lives, yet conceal the divine secret.

O brother, if people do not buy or sell in this bazaar, and we have no other capital than being born in penury, at least we are allowed to gaze upon Something worth beholding!

If I cannot buy an ass-load of sugar,
At least let me fan the flies away from it.

When righteous Joseph was sold in the bazaar in Egypt, his price exceeded the treasures of kings. An old man had a few kilograms of cotton. He picked it up and came to the bazaar. He said: "I shall buy this slave." People said: "Old man, you have become mad. His price exceeds the treasures of kings. How can you purchase him with this cotton?" He replied: "I know this, but I have brought it in order to be numbered among those who wanted to purchase him."

Whoever is not coloured by this love
Is considered sticks or stones by God.

Notes

- 1 "Ahmad Yahya Maneri, known as 'Sharaf'" is the most formal way Maneri refers to himself, e.g. at the beginning of letter 85 in this collection. 'Ahmad' was the name given to him at birth; 'Yahya' was his father's name; and 'Maneri' means 'of Maner,' referring to his place of birth. As an examination of these letters will quickly reveal, his normal way of referring to himself is simply as "Sharaf Maneri." When he became famous he was known as 'Sharafuddin'—"the Honour of the Faith" – but in Bihar itself he is commonly referred to as "Makhdum Sahib." This literally means "the Respected Served One," but "the Revered Master" is probably a more apt English rendition. When people wrote about him they often used the expression "Sheikh Sharafuddin Maneri." In this work he is commonly referred to simply as 'Maneri' in the endnotes. This is meant to be respectful and, at the same time, indicative of his stature.
- 2 Jackson, Paul, *The Way of a Sufi: Sharafuddin Maneri*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, Delhi, 1987, pp.1-82.
- 3 Id., pp.242-250.
- 4 Jackson, Paul, *Khwan-i Pur Ni'mat: A Table Laden with Good Things*, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, Delhi, 1986, p. 1.
- 5 Some manuscripts do not have Sheikh Umar as the addressee in letters 10 and 15. The location of these letters, however, indicates that he was the addressee.
- 6 MSS 2385, 2463, 1396 and 1395 respectively. These MSS are all found in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Bankipore, Patna.
- 7 For example, in the Khuda Bakhsh Library, Persian MSS Hand List 1394, 1395, 1396 (catalogue 1363, 1364 & 1365 respectively) and 2463.
- 8 *in davist chand maktub* is found on folio 1b of MS 1394.
- 9 For example, Ethe (now in the British Museum) no. 1844; Asiatic Society of Bengal, Ivanow, 1205; Madrasa-i Muhammadi, Chennai, MS no. 244.
- 10 For example, Ethe no. 1845; Ivanow no. 1206, even though the Preface speaks of 152 letters; Salar Jung, Hyderabad, Tas. 197 (acc. no. 735, cat. no. 3258/97).
- 11 Ethe 1844 has *in sad o panjah maktub* on folio 1.
- 12 On the basis of different criteria the translator has queries about some of the letters from no. 151 onwards. This was another reason for electing to present the original 150 letters on the basis of manuscript evidence.
- 13 *The Way of a Sufi*, p. 249.
- 14 The compiler does not specifically mention his name, but it occurs in the fourteenth couplet of his encomium as Ashraf Rukn. It is the same person who is responsible for writing down Maneri's commentary on the famous Sufi text, *Adab ul-Muridin*. This work is entitled *Sharh-i Adab ul-Muridin*. The reference can be found in the *Way of a Sufi*, pp. 103-4, where his full name is given as Muhammad bin Muhammad Isa ul-Balkhi, known as Sharaf Rukn.
- 15 Notes 8-11 are relevant in choosing the figure of 150 letters. Some manuscripts containing the additional letters have changed this figure, as quoted in note 8.
- 16 Some of the recipients of Maneri's letters can be identified, but most are unknown to us - as in this instance. A note will be given only to identify a known recipient. The simplified spelling of names and the pronunciation commonly found in the Indian subcontinent are used in this translation, e.g. 'Usman' instead of 'Uthman.' Unless

otherwise noted, the principal manuscript followed is Persian MS 1396 (Hand List), incomplete and undated, found in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, (KBOPL) Patna. Other MSS, notably H.L.1395, 1394 and 2463, as well as accession no. 2385, were also utilized. The MSS numbered 1394, 1395 and 1396 correspond to MSS 1363, 1364 and 1365 in the catalogue, vol. XVI.

17. Abgila has now become an outer suburb of Gaya, Bihar, as the town has expanded. In earlier centuries a number of reputed scholars came from Abgila.
18. The phrase - Maneri's most commonly used greeting - is *salaam wa du'a*. It is translated as "prayerful greetings."
19. The Persian is *bedanad*, "let him know." Where Maneri used the third person, we use the second person in current English usage. This form of address has been adopted in this translation.
20. *Al-kitab* (The Book) usually refers to the Quran, as it does here. The quotation marks indicate that the original quotation is in Arabic. Normally it is a saying of the Prophet, or about the Prophet, known as an *hadith*. (This is an instance when the original Arabic pronunciation is preferred to that commonly used in India.) It is also to be noticed that in both the Quran and the *hadith* the royal plural is frequently found when God is speaking.
21. The work referred to is the whole endeavour of treading the Sufi Path which leads to union with God. People thus engaged are referred to as travellers or seekers.
22. A feature of Maneri's writings is his frequent quotations from Persian poetry, usually unattributed. They remain so in this translation.
23. Muhammad.
24. In the Persian text whenever Muhammad is referred to, commonly by the word *rasul* (Apostle), a blessing is invariably added, normally "God bless him and grant him salvation!" The Persian word used in this instance, *paighambar*, means 'messenger,' and is translated as such in this work. 'Prophet' is used to translate *nabi*.
25. When Sufis - such as Khwaja Fuzail Iyaz - are mentioned, a phrase is commonly added, "The mercy of God be upon him!" Fuzail was born in Khorasan and was a highwayman before his conversion. He spent his final years in Mecca, where he died in 803 A.D. In this translation all dates are taken from the Gregorian Calendar, *Anno Domini*, (in the year of the Lord), now commonly referred to as C.E., Common Era.
26. *Rast guft har ke guft*, (Whoever said this spoke correctly), is an expression commonly used by Maneri to introduce poetry. Unless the introductory phrase is of significance, it is omitted, as is a sentence found here in MS 1396 but not in other MSS.
27. *Kibrit-i ahmar*, the philosopher's stone, has the power to change base metals into precious ones. Sufis have a similar role to play.
28. *Sahib-i ruzgari*, by which a Sufi master is meant.
29. In Islamic law, if a man divorces his wife and then wants to remarry her, she has to get married to someone else; the marriage has to be consummated; and a divorce has to be obtained. Only then can a remarriage take place.
30. Usman was one of Muhammad's companions and became the third caliph, from 644 to 656, when he was assassinated. The expression, *razi ullah anhi* (The favour of God be upon him!), an expression commonly used for Companions of the Prophet, is added after his name.

31. The "life to come" referred to is the goal of all human beings who are meant to return to God from Whom they came in the first place.
32. Ramazan is the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. It is the month of fasting from all food and drink, from dawn till sunset.
33. Khwaja Khizr is a legendary figure who reputedly discovered and drank from the fountain of life. His name means "The Green One." His name does not occur in the Quran, but he is widely believed to be the mysterious person Moses met in Q18: 60-82.
34. Solomon was reputed to have been taught the language of birds.
35. Based on his own experience, Maneri is convinced that God will provide an appropriate guide for a genuine seeker.
36. Arabic letters are being referred to. These particular ones have entirely dissimilar shapes.
37. Abu Jahl was a Meccan leader killed in the battle of Badr, 624, whereas Abu Yazid - or Bayazid - was a Persian Sufi famous for his ecstatic utterances. He was from Bistam in Persia where he died in 874.
38. A Qazi is a Muslim judge.
39. The word is *mufti*, a person trained in Islamic Law, and so capable of giving an official decision, known as a *fatwa*.
40. A dervish is usually an itinerant Muslim ascetic in Maneri's writings. The word can also refer to a member of the famous "Whirling Dervishes" of Konya, Turkey, followers of Maulana Rumi, the renowned mystical poet who died in 1273 and lies buried in Konya.
41. The Zainuddin in question is Zain Badr Arabi, and the letters referred to are those of the collection known as the *maktubat-i sadī*, (The Hundred Letters).
42. Fariduddin Attar was born in Nishapur, where he also died in 1220. He is regarded as one of the greatest writers of Persian mystical verse. He sang eloquently of the soul's pain at being separated from its Source, and of the movement back to its Divine Origin and Goal. He was one of Maneri's favourite Sufi poets.
43. Maneri is very encouraging, for God is not shy about revealing Himself to those who really want to see Him. He is obviously speaking from personal experience.
44. Once a person has a certain sense of God, no virtue, of itself, is enough to fully satisfy the person.
45. 'Fallen' is a literal translation fully in tune with the passive nature of a mystical experience of God. It is a heightening which a person experiences.
46. The reference is to Abu Bakr who became the first caliph on the death of Muhammad in 632. He died in 634. Islam has the habit of giving titles to prominent people. Muslims know immediately who is being referred to.
47. The reader will notice that this couplet was quoted earlier in the letter. In such instances, the manuscript evidence is followed.
48. The Persian original has *ma* (we). Unless there is a particular reason for retaining this 'royal' plural, the more natural singular is used in this translation.
49. Ain ul-Quzat Hamadani was a Sufi who was executed in Baghdad in 1132 on the charge of heresy. His apologia, the *Tamhidat*, was widely read in Indian Sufi circles.
50. In the original Persian there is a play on *dil* (heart) and *gil* (clay).
51. Uwais Qarani is a legendary figure from Yemen who was supposedly a contemporary of Muhammad. He was first mentioned by Dostowai (d.770) and plays an important role in the history of Sufism. Those Sufis who had no personal spiritual guide are

often known as 'Uwaisis.' He stayed at home in Yemen, according to the legend, and never met Muhammad.

52. Ibn Sirin (d.728) criticized some contemporary Muslim mystics for wearing wool and thus imitating Jesus. They should have followed the example of Muhammad and worn cotton clothing.
53. Hasan Basri (d.728) is generally regarded as the father figure of Sufism. He was a renowned ascetic.
54. The actual images in Persian are those of "livers turning to water" and "hearts being roasted alive." Where images are meaningful for a reader of contemporary English, they are naturally retained. Otherwise - as in this instance - the meaning is conveyed.
55. Rabia of Basra (d.801) is the only female Sufi treated at length by the Mediaeval compilers of Sufi hagiographies. She is credited with having introduced the disinterested love of God as the goal of the Sufi.
56. Imam Shibli (d.945) was a government official in Baghdad who underwent a conversion experience. Because of his strange behaviour he was several times confined to an asylum. His sayings and eccentric behaviour provided food for thought for later Sufis.
57. Nimrod is referred to in Genesis 10:8. He is referred to several times in the Quran. He is portrayed as the persecutor of Abraham, whom he tried to throw into a great fire. Like Pharaoh, he typifies human pride and opposition to God.
58. Both work and author remain untraced.
59. Five couplets are found in some manuscripts at this point, but not in MS 1396. It is clear from a study of the various known MSS that a large number of verses were added to the letters over a period of time. Where there is good MS evidence of their being interpolations, they are omitted (as in this instance). Sa'di (d.1292) is one of the best known of all Persian poets. His *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) is a fundamental text of Persian literature. His beautiful tomb is on the outskirts of Shiraz, Iran.
60. Qarun is the biblical Korah, who led the rebellion against Moses (Num.16:1). He appears three times in the Quran (28:76-82; 29:39; and 40:24,25). He is another figure of a proud, ungrateful and rebellious man.
61. Abraham was given the title of *Khalil-ullah* (The Friend of God).
62. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. He is mentioned four times in the Quran: 3:37-41; 6:85; 19:2-11; and 21:89.
63. This is a famous *hadith qudsi*, i.e., a saying in which God is the speaker. The person being referred to is Muhammad.
64. The Heavenly Quran. The letters referred to are in the Arabic script.
65. The reader is invited to reflect on the relative nature of such statements. The world, for example, is 'accursed' only in so far as a person is not led therein to its Lord. All creatures are good in themselves, but can be misused. The letter provides guidance for the fruitful use of creatures so that a person is led towards, not away from, his final end. The 'world' refers more specifically to the pomp, glory, prestige and power exemplified in Islamic spiritual literature by such persons as Pharaoh, Nimrod and Qarun.
66. The *jinn* were the desert spirits of Arab folk lore. They are mentioned in the Quran.
67. Muhammad.
68. The word used for 'faith' is *din*, which can be translated as 'religion,' or 'the faith,' and refers to the whole belief system and cultic practice of Islam. This is the

embodiment of *iman*, which refers to one's core belief in God, one's personal, living 'faith' in God.

69. The reference is to the heavenly tablet and prototype of the Quran.
70. At this point the reader of MS 1396 has to go to the margin for the rest of this short anecdote. The translation continues from the text itself in line with the assumption that MS 1396 is a later copy of a very early MS. That is why it does not contain many of the verses which are obviously later interpolations, some of which, however, have been added in the margin. They are not included in this translation, unless there is some clear reason for doing so.
71. The reader will come across this couplet quite frequently in these letters. It is possible that Maneri composed it himself. Some manuscripts do not contain the final negative which is demanded by the metre. In this case the translation would be: "I'm no Hindu, Muslim or apostate: simply a wrongdoer." The translation given in the text, however, reflects the commonly accepted reading, and also has the added merit of highlighting, in an unexpected way, Maneri's radical teaching about "making no claims."
72. There is considerable discrepancy regarding the text of this letter, as is also true for the previous letter. The translation of both is based primarily on the text of Persian MS 1396 in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.
73. The word variously translated as 'high resolve,' 'resolution,' is *himmat*. Maneri unambiguously stresses the need of this firm, generous, high resolve for anyone seriously treading the Sufi Path but, in line with his general admonition to "make no claims," he is averse to making any claim to possess this virtue himself.
74. This prayer is recited, in Arabic, at the end of ritual prayer before the bestowal of peace, first to those on the worshipper's right, and then to those on the left.
75. Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr. She was given in marriage to Muhammad in 623. She became his favourite wife. He died in her apartment in 632, while she herself died in 678. Like all Muhammad's widows, she did not marry again, as this was specifically prohibited in the Quran.
76. The Night of Power (*Lailat ul-Qadr*) is the mysterious, excellent night in Ramazan during which the Quran was first revealed. It is referred to in Sura 97, entitled *Surat ul-Qadr*.
77. Umar Khattab was the second caliph, succeeding Abu Bakr in 634 until his assassination in 644. He did much to solidify and expand the caliphate.
78. The love story of Majnun and Laila is the Islamic equivalent of Romeo and Juliet. Majnun—meaning 'possessed by jinn' – is madly in love with Laila, whose name means 'night'. Thus there are frequent references to her beautiful, dark complexion.
79. Islamic teaching holds that the prophets are blessed with 'sinlessness,' *ismat*.
80. 'Fault' translates *zallat*. The word could be *zillat* (slip). Hence "indeliberate faults" seems to convey most accurately what is meant.
81. The original is *haman miqdar gunah az ishan ast*.
82. *Az saghira khali nayand*.
83. *Ba imkan-i kabira*.
84. Fakhruddin Iraqi (d.1289) was a famous mystical poet who spent some twenty-five years in Multan with Baha'uddin Zakariya. Leaving Multan he journeyed to Konya and ended up in Damascus. His tomb there is close to that of Ibn Arabi.

85. The Persian has *guman-i bad*. A literal rendition would be "a bad opinion." From the context, however, it is clear that 'lowly' conveys more accurately than 'bad' what Maneri had in mind. It is the humility of a person who has had a profoundly transformative experience of God.
86. *Sirat* is the extremely narrow bridge over hell. All have to pass across it. The wicked will fall off it and plunge headlong into hell.
87. Sufyan Sauri was a famous Sufi born in Kufa. He came into conflict with the authorities and went into hiding in Mecca. He died in Basra in 778.
88. The sacrifice referred to is that of *Id ul-Azha*, the Feast of Sacrifices, celebrated on the 10th of *Dhul-Hijja*, the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham. On the previous day, i.e. 9th, all the pilgrims gather on and around Mt. Arafat in order to present themselves to God from noon till sunset.
89. *Khata*.
90. Abraham's special title is *Khalil-ullah* (The Friend of God). The Friend par excellence, of course, is God.
91. The reference is either to Maneri's Firdausi Order, founded by him in Bihar Sharif, or to Sufis in general.
92. Mount Tur is usually understood to refer to Mt Sinai.
93. A marginal note says that this letter was addressed to the previously mentioned addressee, i.e. Sheikh Umar.
94. The Persian word is *bad*. 'Corrupt' seems to convey what is meant - the network of power relationships meant to promote the common good, but often used by those in power to promote self, regardless of the rights of others.
95. The name of a great devotee in Islamic lore who was finally misled by Satan.
96. Six lines of Arabic follow in MS 1396. As they are not found in other MSS, they are omitted.
97. Amir Khusrav (d.1325) was the most famous poet of the Delhi Sultanate. In addition to his eminence as a Persian poet, he was also the founder of the Indo-Muslim musical tradition. His output of mystical poetry, however, was meagre, even though he was a close associate of the famous Sufi of Delhi, Nizamuddin Auliya (d.1325).
98. The original is *dar muhabbat wa ishq*. Both words are normally translated by the word 'love', but some distinction had to be made here. It is followed in this letter, but not necessarily elsewhere.
99. Khwaja Usman Maghribi was obviously a Sufi. He remains untraced. As already mentioned, when no information is readily available about a person quoted, no note is given.
100. Explicit mention is made of a letter received from the addressee, Sheikh Umar. Reference is made to matters mentioned in the letter. Not possessing the original letter, or any of the letters to which Maneri sends his replies, we do not know exactly what had been written to him and how to interpret his initial remarks. We can only speculate what these, and remarks in other letters, may mean.
101. The Persian word is *murid*. It is translated here as 'disciple', for Sheikh Umar is obviously a disciple of considerable prominence. When the word clearly refers to a genuine beginner, it is translated as 'novice'.
102. i.e. Maneri himself.

103. Elsewhere, Maneri refers to exceptions to the Law. For example, eating a human corpse is clearly forbidden yet, if a starving person has nothing else to eat, in this situation it becomes a lawful act. What is presupposed in all this is that the guide is himself completely open to God and will not act against the Will of God in anything. The danger posed by false guides, as well as by false prophets, however, is abundantly clear.
104. The sense is to be an uninvited guest – *tufail* - accompanying a distinguished person who has been invited to a feast. This is a spontaneous cry from the heart of Maneri for a "soul mate," someone who has travelled as far along the Path to God as he has, a person who could both understand and inspire him. In fact, however, by this stage of his life, everyone turned to him for guidance and inspiration. This makes for a certain 'loneliness' - if this is an apt expression to use for such a God-centred person!
105. Some MSS give Sheikh Umar as the addressee of this letter.
106. i.e. the Devil is being referred to. The word used in this context in the Quran is *Iblis*. It is found nine times in the Quran. The other word found is *shaitan*. This occurs fifty- two times. In the second *sura* of the Quran, both words occur interchangeably in verses 34 and 36. This is Maneri's practice also, for both words are thus used in this paragraph. In this translation, for the sake of simplicity, *Iblis* is rendered as 'the Devil' and *shaitan* as 'Satan,' even though cogent linguistic arguments could be adduced for the reverse.
107. The Persian is: *Pir parasti beh ki khudai parasti*. This is clearly open to abuse.
108. The Persian is: *Pir-i parwar beh ki khuda-yi parwar*.
109. Sanai (d.1131) was a court poet who turned to writing mystical poetry. He is one of the great poets in the tradition of Persian mystical poetry.
110. Abul Hasan Kharaqani was an illiterate Persian peasant who became a Sufi famous for his aphorisms. He died in 1034.
111. Many traditions not found in the standard collections of *hadith* were in circulation among the Sufis. Maneri makes use of them for didactic purposes.
112. Khwaja Ma'ruf Karkhi lived in Baghdad. He was one of the earliest Sufis to speak about divine love. He taught that it was a gift from God, not something you could acquire. He died in 815 and was buried in Karkh, which is across the Tigris from Baghdad.
113. This is a long – ten-volume – work by Abu Nu'aim al-Isfahani, who died in 1037.
114. Israfil is the angel who will blow the trumpet on the Day of Judgement. His name does not occur in the Quran.
115. The pain involved is that of not finding God. The deeper a person's experience of God, the more acute the pain of seemingly having 'lost' Him.
116. During his Ascent Muhammad came within "two bows' length" of God. Hence the phrase indicates nearness to God.
117. The Persian is *danam*. This is a very rare expression in Maneri's writings. 'I' scarcely ever occurs, except in conventional phrases like "you and me, and the likes of us," in a deprecatory sense.
118. Adam.
119. Adam was given the title, *Safi-ullah* (The Chosen One of God), and commentators say it was wheat which he had eaten in paradise.
120. This couplet is in Arabic.

121. Literally, "whose livers are roasted today and whose hearts swim with blood."
122. Abu Bakr Wasiti (d. after 932) was a Sufi from Fargana who, for some time, moved in Junaid's circle in Baghdad. He was known for pithy statements expressing deep spiritual insight.
123. This tradition is often quoted, but Firestone says, in his study, *Jihad*, that it is not found in any of the recognized collections. The words are attributed to Muhammad upon returning from battle. Maneri's quote shows that the saying had a wide circulation by the fourteenth century.
124. In Islam, the "lesser struggle" - *jihad-i asghar* - is that of military warfare, while the "greater struggle" - *jihad-i akbar* - is against one's selfish soul, *nafs*.
125. Qazi Shamsuddin was the recipient of all but two of Maneri's first collection of letters known as *The Hundred Letters*, sent during 1346-47. This letter occurs in that collection as letter 29. There are differences, however, so this letter, as well as the next three, for example, corresponding respectively to letters 55, 4 and 72 in the first collection, has been translated from the text as it appears in this collection. In this letter eight couplets are found in different places, while in the former collection, only one.
126. The reference is to Muhammad, but the teaching applies to all genuine Muslims.
127. The reference is to the Quran, which none but the purified (i.e. Muslims) may touch. Non-Muslims, who do not 'touch' the Quran, are beyond the pale of Islam.
128. The reference is to a *ra'kat* of prayer, a unit of successive bodily postures during the formal prayer of Islam, known as *namaz* in India. The Arabic word for formal prayer is *salat*.
129. The varied activity ensures that a person who sincerely wishes to spend a whole night in vigil can do so in a fruitful manner.
130. Qazi Sadruddin was a senior disciple of Sharafuddin Maneri's. He was in Chausa, probably as a guest of Qazi Shamsuddin, the administrator of Chausa - *hakim-i Chausa* - as the following letter indicates.
131. *Wahy*.
132. *Itham*.
133. Maneri is well aware of the danger of simply reading, talking, dreaming or even praying about "getting down to work." None of these is a substitute for actual effort in the spiritual life.
134. *Maqam* (stage) and *hal* (state) refer, respectively, to the general level one has attained in the spiritual life, and to the existential spiritual experience at a particular moment.
135. There will be great rejoicing when God lifts the final veil which obstructs our vision of Him.
136. The story of the young men who, together with their dog, fell asleep in a cave and didn't stir for hundreds of years, is narrated in *sura 18* in the Quran.
137. The Day of Resurrection is meant by the word 'tomorrow'.
138. The reference is to the 12th & 13th, or 13th, 14th & 15th days of the lunar month, which begins with the new moon.
139. No one can be numbered along with God, i.e. be considered as important as He is in one's life. He must remain supreme.
140. The Persian is, *ba hich makhluci kari na*, which would literally mean: "no work with any creature." The translation seeks to convey the sense that a person's primary

involvement should be with God. No creature should be allowed to threaten this primacy.

141. Khwaja Sari Saqati was one of the Baghdad school of Sufis. He died around 867. He was an influential Sufi teacher and writer.
142. Azar was Abraham's father, and Abdullah, Muhammad's.
143. The Persian word *banda* means a servant who was normally a slave in the context in which these letters were written. It is sometimes difficult to choose which word conveys more accurately, for the modern reader, the overtones of meaning found in a particular usage of *banda*. The same remark applies to the Arabic word, '*abd*'. In general, 'servant' has been used.
144. The whole line of argument is that a person who has bound himself to his spiritual guide has to obey him unquestioningly. The reference to poison, however, is not to be taken literally, as it would be suicide, which is clearly condemned as a heinous crime in Islam.
145. Satan.
146. Servant of God.
147. The reference is to Moses' journey and encounter with a mysterious person - identified at Khizr - as found in the Quran, *sura* 18.
148. The army referred to was that of the Sultan of Bengal, Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah. The township in question was Chausa, administered by Qazi Shamsuddin. The incident probably occurred around 1351.
149. The reference is to the destruction and looting of crops by the advancing army.
150. Abu Bakr.
151. The Persian is: *sunnat-i kar dar shahid wa gha'ib bar in jarist*.
152. *Wuzu* is the technical term for ablution. It involves washing the hands; face; arms up to the elbows; and feet up to the ankles. All these actions are performed according to a prescribed form.
153. A worshipper performs two cycles of prayer in thanksgiving for having completed the requisite preparatory rites for prayer. A cycle - *rak'at* - is the basic unit of ritual prayer, and consists of seven successive movements accompanied by their appropriate recitations.
154. A watch is considered to be three hours, while night prayer is *namaz-i tahajjud*, consisting of from eight to twelve cycles of prayer. It is a voluntary imitation of a practice of Muhammad.
155. The long prayer which follows is in Arabic. Did Maneri compose it? The likelihood is that it is a favourite prayer of his taken from some prayer manual in Arabic.
156. There is a copy of this two-volume Persian commentary in the Khuda Bakhsh Library (Pers. MSS nos. 1112 & 1113). It is known as *Tafsir-i Zahidi*. Its author, Abu Nasr Ahmad bin Hasan bin Ahmad Sulaimani ur-Ranuhaki, completed the work in 1125. It was Maneri's favourite Quranic commentary.
157. Some material found in letter 27 is repeated in this one.
158. Abdullah ibn Abbas was Muhammad's first cousin and a noted traditionist.
159. It is difficult to follow clearly comments made about an incident of which we are ignorant. It is obvious, however, that Maneri was not pleased with the behaviour of the addressee.

160. This principle has far-reaching social implications, for it lays great stress on the effect our actions have on other people, something often overlooked by a wooden adherence to duty, or an overly personalistic form of piety.
161. This information supplements that supplied by Zain Badr Arabi in the Preface to the *Maktubat-i Sadi*, (*The Hundred Letters*). It describes succinctly how the book, consisting of 98 letters written to Qazi Shamsuddin and two to Qazi Sadruddin, came to be written.
162. The Letters are undoubtedly Maneri's Hundred Letters to Qazi Shamsuddin. The presumption is that he is the recipient of the present letter.
163. In other words, readers will draw profit according to their actual dispositions.
164. What is at stake is the need for a constant review of one's actions in order to check whether they are in accordance with the Will of God or not, coupled with a caution about too much preoccupation with analyzing them, for this distracts a person from being focussed on God.
165. Abu Ali Rudbari was a Baghdad Sufi who died in 934 .
166. The 'friend' is obviously the selfish soul - *nafs* - while 'soul' is the translation of *jan*. The former appellation is ironical.
167. Qazi Zahid was one of Maneri's most important disciples. This is evident from the affection shown to him as the saint lay on his death-bed. "Catching hold of Qazi Zahid's hand, he placed it on his blessed breast, saying: 'We are the same! We are both mad with love!' Then, humbly, he added, 'Rather, we are dust beneath the feet of those maddened by love,'" as related in the *Wafat Nama*, the account of Maneri's death, written by his faithful secretary, Zain Badr Arabi.
168. There are discrepancies in the manuscripts. MS 1396, f.119b, has: "Muhammad, his steadfastness purifies both worlds." As the name itself is found without the customary blessing, it is most likely an interpolation. Here, MS 1395 f.120b is followed, which agrees with the Urdu translation.
169. Malik Dinar was the son of a Persian slave who became a disciple of Hasan of Basra. He was noted for his asceticism. He was also a noted traditionist. He died in 748.
170. While not ruling out the possibility of simultaneity, nevertheless it seems most likely that this, like a number of other sayings, has a Christian origin. Once it entered into the body of Islamic literature, however, its origin was quickly forgotten and it became part and parcel of the Islamic heritage, as we find it here, and is thought of and treated as such. It is an example of the symbiosis that is constantly taking place in all religious groups which are alive and responding to fresh stimuli.
171. The shorter, MS 1395 reading, is followed.
172. The Persian is: *Ishq banda ra be khuda'i mirasanad*, the literal translation of which is: "Love causes the servant to reach God."
173. The idea seems to be that a seeker after God will attract all sorts of burdens - as Maneri himself constantly states - and this results in God's "bearing him up," so to say. If you accept the burdens of love, God Himself will be your support.
174. It seems that Maneri has the fate of al-Hallaj in mind, who was executed in Baghdad in 922. Here, as elsewhere where al-Hallaj's death is referred to, the Persian word used is *dar*. This can refer to crucifixion, hanging, or impaling on a stake. In this translation "the gallows" is the common rendition of the word.
175. The Persian is: *talib ra az vai durist ki behkudi mahjubast*.

176. This letter - apart from notes 152 and 155 - has been translated according to the basic text, Persian MS no. 1396. MS no. 1395 has eleven verse additions totalling 16 couplets. The Urdu translation has thirteen additions, totalling eighteen couplets. The theme of the letter - love - attracted this 'supplementing' of the text. The presumption has to be that verses are added to, not deleted from, a text such as this.
177. Yahya Mu'az Razi was a Persian Sufi, born in Rayy, near Tehran, who was known for his great trust in God. His writings show he had experienced God's infinite love. He was also noted as a preacher. The letter referred to is famous in Sufi literature. He died in Nishapur in 871.
178. Bayazid Bistami, the famous Persian Sufi who died in 874. He is famous for his ecstatic utterance, "Subhani - Praise be to Me, how great is My Majesty!"
179. There can be no "going back," even to a particular perfection or blessing, except to utilize it as a stimulus for moving ahead. These gifts are meant to provide assistance along the Path to God. There can be no question of "settling for less" where the quest for God is concerned.
180. Al-Hallaj.
181. The title of the letter, and the addressee, are both found in MS 1395, but not in 1396.
182. MS 1395 has the name 'Zahid' in the text, while 1396 has it added in the margin.
183. The contrast is made with ordinary human activity where a causal nexus between effort and result is clear. A connection exists here also, otherwise why bother teaching, guiding and instructing unless the activity of a disciple counts? The point is that divine grace, not human activity, is the ultimate factor in the task of seeking holiness.
184. The story is related in the Quran, 18:9ff. The story depicts them as simply sleeping for over 300 years.
185. Maneri was not a man for what he considered sterile theological discussion, e.g. on points such as the created or uncreated nature of the Quran.
186. The Devil declares himself to be superior to Adam and was cursed for disobeying God's explicit command to prostrate before Adam. (cf. Q7:11-18)
187. Maneri is, of course, referring to himself. It is a most unusual statement for him. Perhaps the explanation lies more in the state of the recipient, as the context clearly shows, and is really meant to encourage him during a difficult period.
188. Maneri actually died more than a dozen years after these lines were written.
189. This is the language of the mystics. God comes and fills a person. What was formerly highly esteemed now appears worthless.
190. It is Satan who is speaking. He was cursed by God for his pride and disobedience.
191. The title is *dar ma'rifat-i 'aql*. The normal meaning of *ma'rifat* in Maneri's writings is the mystical, intimate or personal knowledge of God. For stylistic purposes the word is sometimes translated simply as 'knowledge' in this letter.
192. Maulana Kamaluddin was referring to Maneri's collection of One Hundred Letters - *Maktubat-i Sadi*. The particular letter in question is no.45 entitled: "Mystical Knowledge of the Transcendent Creator."
193. Maneri is speaking. The actual word used is *du'agu*, meaning one who prays for someone, a well-wisher. It is a delicate way of relating to his addressee, especially as he is about to disagree with him.

194. Abu Hanifa (d. 767) was the founder of the Hanifite school or rite – *mazhab* - to which most Sunni Muslims of North India adhere. He is their Great Imam.
195. The word used here, as in the whole discussion, is *ma'rifat*. The difficulty is that the knowledge of God which is arrived at on the basis of a process of argumentation from signs, is analogical, not intuitive or mystical in nature. It could be argued that, for Maneri, *ma'rifat* covers any real knowledge of God, no matter how it is obtained.
196. The Arabic quotation has *la nafs ul-ma'rifa* (not the essence of mystical knowledge). This introduces a gradation in *ma'rifat*. This is congruent with the usage of the term in this letter.
197. The full name of the work is *At-tamhid fi biyan it-tauhid* by Abu Shakur Md bin 'Abd as-Sayyid bin Shu'aib al-Kashshi, a Hanifi scholar of the Maturidi school from the 5th century A.H. The Khuda Bakhsh Library has three copies of the work, cf. Arabic Manuscripts, vol X, Theology, nos. 494, 495 & 496.
198. The work known as *Tafsir-i Zahidi*, as already noted, was written by Abu Nasr Ahmad bñ Hasan bin Ahmad Sulaimani ur-Raruhaki. He wrote it in Bukhara and completed it on 9th Shawwal, 519 A.H. (1125 A.D.) The copy of the work found in the Khuda Bakhsh Library (Persian MSS, nos. 1112-3) is in two volumes. The scribe was Muhammad Akram. It is curious to note that the first volume (*suras* 1-17) was completed on 4th Rabi' 11, 1125 A.H., while the second (sura 18-end) is dated 21 Ramazan, 1122 A.H.
199. The Persian is: *khudai ra shinasad chunanki andar Quran guft*. It seems that the meaning is that these people recognized a Supreme Power, but mistakenly thought it was the sun.
200. The Queen of Sheba.
201. While the example may make us smile, the essential argument is universally accepted. A person may be a genius in some field, but is not necessarily a mystic. On the other hand, Maneri insists that a certain amount of intellectual ability is a prerequisite for any traveller on the Sufi Path.
202. The reference is to God's guidance and protection of Joseph in the whole 'affair' of his being taken to Egypt and his rise to power and fame. This illustrates the whole point of the letter. Just as God makes use of various people as instruments in the Joseph 'affair,' similarly He makes use of the human intellect as an 'instrument' for the attainment of a truly mystical or intimate knowledge of Himself, yet such knowledge is ultimately due to His activity, His initiative, His grace.
203. The title word *'ishq* can be translated simply as 'love' or as "passionate love" in the sense that it involves a person's entire being, including the emotions. For stylistic purposes simple 'love' is used in this letter. It should be noted, however, that in the second half of the letter – from "the love of anything other than God" – the original switches to *muhabbat*.
204. *Khahar zada-i kātib* (the son of the writer's sister). The writer being referred to is Maneri himself. From the following letter, no. 42, we know that his name is Zainuddin.
205. The Persian has: *guyand dozakh-i muhibban ishq-i khudai bashad*.
206. "Am I not your Lord" (Q7:172) are the words addressed by God to the whole human race.
207. The reference is to Abraham and his son. For Christians and Jews, this is Isaac. For Muslims, it is Ishmael.
208. In the biblical narrative it was a question of obedience. Here it is a question of love. Maneri's mind is expressed clearly in the 66th of The Hundred Letters: "Loving

something partial and dependent in no way detracts from the perfection of love." He himself was a very warm, loving person, as is beautifully illustrated in the *Wafat Nama*, an account of his last hours. Indeed all creatures, even one's enemies, are to be loved, but the love of God must reign supreme.

209. God is speaking.
210. A Sufi is content with little, for his real contentment is in God. There is also a play on words: *qaba chun 'aba*.
211. The reference is to the trials attendant upon love. The translation provides the noun 'lovers' for the pronoun 'they'.
212. This is a famous *hadith qudsi*, i.e. one in which God is the speaker. Here He is addressing Muhammad.
213. He is speaking about the vision of God.
214. Mahmud of Ghazna, Afghanistan, who died in 1030, is well-known in Indian history for his series of raids into North India. In Sufi literature, however, he is linked to Ayaz, an slave officer of his, who is completely and utterly devoted to him.
215. The object of the seeing is God.
216. MS no. 1396 repeats the prayer, but MS no. 1395 does not. The shorter version is given here.
217. Maulana Sadruddin is the addressee of this letter, as well as of the two following ones. He is most probably the senior disciple to whom letters 8 and 9 of *The Hundred Letters* were addressed, and is referred to as being present in Chausa with Qazi Shamsuddin, the addressee of the remaining 98 letters of the collection. In letters 4 and 55 Qazi Shamsuddin is advised to seek any needed clarification of any doubtful matters pertaining to the Sufi Path from Qazi Sadruddin, according to the title given to him in that collection. As the following letter refers to his appointment as Deputy Qazi in Sonargaon, the title is clearly not inappropriate.
218. Sonargaon. This is situated near modern Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh.
219. Muhammad.
220. Muhammad.
221. It is not the important post in itself which draws forth Maneri's ire, but the fact that a man of such spiritual eminence has accepted it. He considers it a retrograde step. It is possible that Maulana Sadruddin married late in life. He is considered to be in his fifties, and the previous letter, which seems to date from the same period, indicates that his children were all small, and he was their only provider. Perhaps financial constraints explain his acquiescence.
222. A flint would be used for the purpose. The image is real, but the meaning is metaphorical.
223. From the deep emotion revealed in these and earlier words we can easily sense the profound disappointment Maneri felt at the action of a disciple for whom he had the very highest regard.
224. Satan is the "cursed one" in question.
225. The reference is probably to Balaam.
226. The Quran (Q20:87) refers to Samiri as the person who made the golden calf for the children of Israel. The name is also translated as "the Samaritan."

227. Ibrahim ibn Adham (d.790 or so) was reputed to have been a prince of Balkh who renounced his royal inheritance and became an eminent Sufi. He became the subject of many pious tales.
228. The person who ascends the pulpit is honoured, while the one who steps up to the gallows is disgraced.
229. Muhammad.
230. The Last Judgement.
231. Muhammad.
232. The Persian is *khauf*, literally 'fear.' "Fear-tinged awe" is an attempt to convey what is meant.
233. Malik Khizr may be Khwaja Khizr, deputy governor of Bihar under Majd ul-Mulk. He is mentioned in the 48th *majlis* (assembly) narrated in *Ma'din ul-Ma'ani*, the most famous *mattuz* (record) of the discussions in the assemblies presided over by Maneri.
234. This couplet is introduced in the text of MS 1396 but not quoted. It is clearly an oversight, and has therefore been included.
235. The idea is to accept the unpleasant things of life as zestfully as the pleasant. It is definitely not to be taken literally, as suicide is forbidden in Islam.
236. A medicine with harmful effects may be needed to deal with some ailment. The patient takes it, on the advice of a doctor, in the hope that it will effect a cure.
237. This means he has an intimate sense of the working of divine providence as both enveloping and underpinning daily events, as the following sentence indicates.
238. The Egyptian women were using knives to peel fruit when Joseph appeared. They were so smitten by his beauty that they unconsciously cut their hands (Q12:31-32).
239. Bayazid Bistami.
240. This is an example of the characteristic exaggeration of some mystics. We have already noted Shibli's erratic behaviour. The real point is made in the words that follow.
241. The prayer indicates that Nizamuddin himself is dead. The instruction to send a copy of the letter to his mother is important. It is one of the rare indications, in Maneri's writings, that the spiritual aspirations of at least some women were known to him, and that he made efforts to provide them with guidance.
242. Some may query this statement. God is certainly 'displeased' with sin. By definition, however, this is the product of human free will. While the theological implications can be discussed, the sign value remains.
243. Etiquette demanded that a person apologize for whatever is offered to another. It is an implicit avowal of the importance of the guest who really deserved something better than whatever was offered. This applies to God also, even if divine blessings have made the practice of devotion comparatively easy.
244. Bishr ibn-al-Harith (d.841) was known as *al-Hafi* (the bare-footed one). He ended his days in Baghdad. He strove for absolute sincerity – *ikhlas* - in all his actions.
245. The use of the passive voice is a linguistic convention implying that the agent is God. The context confirms this.
246. Uwais was supposed to have lived in Yemen during the lifetime of Muhammad and never to have gone to Mecca. Thus no meeting actually occurred.
247. The word used is *tarsyan*, which means "those who are afraid." It is one of the words used to denote Christians, as the present context itself indicates.

248. The word used is 'aziz which, while normally meaning 'dear', is one of the names of God in the Quran and has many meanings. In the present context it probably refers to Moses.
249. The word used is *da'wat* (invitation), which is the classic Islamic term for what others call missionary activity. It is a simple invitation to the feast of Islam.
250. Maneri is very critical of Maulana Sadruddin's having accepted the post of Deputy Qazi, as is clear from letter 44. This strong language is extremely unusual for him.
251. This is very blunt criticism of those who become the sultan's servants instead of God's, and who turn to them as the focal point of their aspirations, just as Muslims turn towards Mecca to perform their ritual prayers.
252. Abu Talib was the paternal uncle and guardian of Muhammad. Although he did all he could for Muhammad, even after he began his preaching, he died in 619 without having become a Muslim. Abu Jahl, as already noted, was a Meccan leader opposed to Muhammad. He was killed in the battle of Badr in 624.
253. Maulana Sadruddin is being referred to. It seems that Sheikh Sulaiman is the unnamed Qazi mentioned earlier on in the letter.
254. There are variant readings about the date, but the month itself is correct.
255. Adam.
256. The *taqiya* is a stiff round cap around which is wound the cloth constituting the turban proper. This was a very high honour indeed bestowed upon Malik Shamsuddin, as the instructions which follow clearly indicate. Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi was Maneri's spiritual guide. He died in Delhi in 1332.
257. Presumably the boxes were filled with books.
258. The title indicates a wealthy merchant.
259. The *mi'raj* - ascent - is an elaboration of Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem referred to in Q17:1. It was further elaborated by Muslim mystics and became the archetype of the soul's ascent to God.
260. Some MSS give the name "Razi ul-Mulk Mahmud."
261. The preserved tablet - *lauh-i mahfuz* - is a heavenly prototype of the scriptures, pre- eminently the Quran.
262. The MS has a quote in Arabic followed by a Persian rendition. It is this latter which is translated here.
263. There is some confusion about the domicile of the addressee. Satgaon seems to be the most likely place.
264. Here Bayazid is meant.
265. *Fihad-i akbar*, (the greater struggle), as already seen, means the struggle against one's selfish soul. It is compared to the lesser struggle - *jihad-i asghar* - which refers to military campaigns.
266. It has to be kept in mind that these letters, unlike those of *The Hundred Letters*, which were meant to form a treatise, as letter 31 in this collection clearly indicates, are written to individuals. Maneri offers advice according to the spiritual needs of the addressee. He seems to have picked up that Maulana Mahmud is proud of his acts of devotion. It is this element of pride, stemming from his selfish soul, that he is addressing. There is no question of Maneri's questioning the value of ritual prayer and fasting, as prescribed by the Law. That is taken for granted.

267. The text has an Arabic quote and a Persian rendition. This latter adds 'himself,' and is what has been translated here.
268. The term *diwana* refers to a person who is 'mad,' or so deeply in love as to be out of his senses.
269. Azazel is considered to be a fallen angel. In the Bible, Leviticus 16:8-10 & 20-22, part of the ritual on the Day of Atonement was to dedicate a scapegoat to Azazel. The goat was released into the wilderness.
270. In seemingly impossible situations there lies a hidden kindness, as illustrated by the story of Joseph.
271. It is essential to keep this opening statement in mind. The letter is first and foremost meant to encourage someone in a difficult situation. The theological setting is Asharite - as succinctly expressed in the sentence which follows - and the stress is consequently on the supremacy of divine causality. Maneri wants the recipient to turn towards God in hope, not remain taken up with his own condition. Time and again we encounter this teaching.
272. The reference is to the *mi'raj* (ascent) of the Prophet to great intimacy with God.
273. The Day of Resurrection is meant. The use of 'tomorrow' shows the living immediacy of the event in the mind of the author.
274. Maneri's own writings are mainly letters, but there is also a large body of his recorded discourses, referred to here as *kalimat*, but usually known as *malfuzat*, the most important being *Ma'din ul-Ma'ani*.
275. Maneri's position, as found in his writings, is very clear. The ideal is to associate with a spiritual guide. This is called *pir-i suhbat*. Where this is not possible, one has to be content with reading the works of a spiritual master. Reading is also a good supplement to associating with a guide.
276. Abdullah Ansari (d.1089) is from Herat in Western Afghanistan, where he lies buried. His *Munajat* (Colloquies), in Persian, are an outpouring of love.
277. The Persian is: *ai baradar az sar-i khud barkhizad wa khud ra ba'ishq taslim kun chun khud ra badu taslim kardi rasidi*.
278. The image evoked is that of the Sufi martyr, Al-Hallaj. As already noted, the word *dar* can mean the gallows, crucifixion, or the gibbet. Anyone who loves God supremely must expect to suffer, as Maneri never tires of reiterating.
279. Adam.
280. Moses says these words in the Quran. Muhammad appropriates them to himself.
281. Muhammad is the Messenger who asks the original, pregnant question. He is emboldened to do so in view of his knowledge of man's dignity, as alluded to in the two quotations. For Maneri, however, the actual vision of God is reserved for the life to come. It has a metaphorical sense when used with reference to this life. Maneri gives the arguments for his position in the 29th assembly recorded in *Khwan-i Pur Ni'mat*.
282. Muhammad, who is "the lord of the world."
283. This has to be understood in the context of the tradition under discussion. When a lover sees his own unworthiness in comparison to the Beloved, he is overwhelmed. This poetic, mystical language is not a licence to commit suicide, which is condemned in Islam.

284. Hamiduddin Nagori (d.1274) was a Chishti Sufi who settled in Nagor in Rajasthan. He is the author of *Lawa'iḥ* (Flashes of Light), a work which seems to be no longer extant.

285. Malik-i Dinar (d.748?) was the son of a Persian slave who became a disciple of Hasan of Basra. *Munajat* means 'intimate conversations.'

286. Ahmad Ghazali (d.1126) was the brother of the more illustrious Abu Hamid Ghazali (d.1111). His short treatise, *Sawaniḥ* (Aphorisms on Love), is his most famous work.

287. Maneri is referring to himself. His language makes it clear that he attributes his entire spiritual progress to God's facilitating grace. How can a 'dog' make claims? Yet he cannot deny the fact that, with God's grace "making things easy for him," as it were, he has made astonishing progress along the path to union with God.

288. The third person masculine singular pronoun here, and in the ensuing sentences, refers to Maneri. This whole letter is a rare and precious instance from Maneri's letters when he speaks directly about his own inner life.

289. Daulatabad was the Southern capital founded by the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq, in 1327.

290. i.e. the name 'prophet.'

291. *Buraq* was Muhammad's mount during his nocturnal ascent.

292. The Qurayza and Nadir were two of the three Jewish tribes in Medina with whom Muhammad came in conflict.

293. Of this world and of paradise.

294. The addressee, "the chief of the nobles," is possibly Malik Jauna, a Brahmin convert.

295. It is unusual for someone to be writing to Maneri with descriptions of what it is like to be caught up in God. Qaseem Sahib - who translated the letters into Urdu - suggests (p.302) that this letter was written to Muzaffar Shams Balkhi. This seems to be correct.

296. God's untrammelled freedom, not any type of capriciousness, is being extolled.

297. This expresses succinctly Maneri's thought on the role of reason. For him, human beings come from God and must strive their utmost to return to Him. They do this by following God's will. Reason has a role to play in elaborating the finer points of this Will in the science of *fīqh*.

298. This is possibly Abu Sa'id Ahmad al-Kharraz (d.899), a disciple of Sari as-Saqati. He was one of the influences on Junaid, a famous Sufi of Baghdad. It is far more likely, however, that it refers to Abu Sa'id Abul Khair, mentioned in letter 73.

299. This is an elaborate formulation of Maneri's oft-repeated expression, "bringing comfort to hearts." It is an unconscious description of the essence of his own life's work.

300. The Persian is "*ma bedin rah yaftim*" (in this way we have found). Both usage and context indicate that the first person singular, not plural, is intended, and the English sentence demands an object, which is supplied by the context. Maneri's formal treatment of 'service' is found in letter 71 in *The Hundred Letters*.

301. The original has *ruh*, which is translated as 'spirit' in this letter and elsewhere. The title, however, has *jan*, which is translated as 'soul' here and elsewhere.

302. Maneri is talking about the beginnings of prayer which is genuinely mystical. A person's soul is so brightly illuminated by divine grace that he falls in love with his own beauty and clings to it, thus effectively closing himself off to further graces, i.e. a more intimate union with God, an occurrence which results in a radical personal transformation, not a merely cosmetic one.

303. Khwaja Abu Sa'id Abul Khair was noted for his asceticism and humble service until he reached the age of forty. Afterwards he enjoyed and shared the good things of life, thanking God for everything. His ten guiding principles were influential in the development of rules for confraternities of Sufis. He died in 1049.
304. Tradition speaks about 72 false sects in Islam. The 73rd group consists of genuine Muslims.
305. Affectionate love, *muhabbat*, becomes passionate love, *ishq*. It is clear that Maneri is speaking about a divine love which has swept him off his feet and shattered his self-centred world. It is 'passionate' in the sense of its being irresistible and completely transformative, not because it is primarily emotional in character. Emotion ebbs and flows, but not the type of love Maneri is talking about.
306. These figures have to be taken in a proportionate, rather than in an absolute, sense.
307. One 'friend' alluded to is Abraham, and the distinguished 'house' is that of Muhammad, whose uncle was Abu Talib. He was his guardian, but he did not become a Muslim.
308. *Hulul* in the original. This not only means 'incarnation,' but is also understood in reference to the Christian belief.
309. "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God." Strictly speaking, it is this profession of faith which makes a person a Muslim. Everything else flows from this.
310. This quatrain is repeated in the manuscripts.
311. For example, the letters found at the beginning of the nineteenth sura. The 'beloved' in question is Muhammad.
312. *Qut ul-Qulub* (Nourishment for Souls), was one of the basic texts of moderate Sufism produced by the Sufis of Baghdad. Makki himself died in 996. Maneri quotes frequently from it, both in his Letters as well as in his recorded discourses.
313. The reference is to Bayazid Bistami.
314. Maneri constantly reiterates his position about the Sufi Path. It is rooted and grounded in the Law of Islam. It goes beyond the Law, but not against it. Hence there is no question, for example, of ever reaching a stage when a person would no longer consider himself bound to offer ritual prayers five times a day.
315. It is historically significant to come across a Muslim in fourteenth-century Bihar making such a statement.
316. It would certainly not be Islamic faith, but it is faith in One God. Jewish monotheism is well known, and the Christian creed begins, *Credo in Unum Deum* (I believe in One God).
317. Muhammad. He is also the "Chosen One" referred to.
318. This is because the lover has given his heart to his beloved.
319. This is an important statement of Maneri's conviction about God's providential care of His creatures. Because of Maneri's profound experience of the divine immediacy in his own life it is easy to see why he feels at home in the Ash'arite speculative theological framework. Whether we agree or not with this framework should not divert our attention from Maneri's conviction. It is obviously based on his own experience.
320. In Persian MS no. 1396 in the Khuda Bakhsh Library, the basic manuscript from which this translation was made, Letter 82 abruptly ends here. The rest of folio 234b is left blank. Letter 83 begins at the top of folio 235a. This is curious, as MS

1395 and 2463 both contain the material, a paragraph in length, which follows. It is not "in tune," as it were, with Maneri's largely practical approach to spiritual matters. Some may doubt its authenticity. The reader will also have noted the total absence of verse in this letter, the main body of which, however, is to be taken as genuine.

- 321. Maneri's point is that goods, held in moderation or put to good use, are essentially good. He is against the disorder of an excessive accumulation of goods, or their improper use.
- 322. Ja'far Sadiq was the sixth imam and is revered as one of the great early Sufi teachers. He died in 765.
- 323. Bayazid Bistami.
- 324. Muhammad.
- 325. This is most probably Nizamuddin Maula, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, the famous Delhi Sufi. He used to visit Maneri while he was still in his cave in Rajgir. He was the moving spirit behind the efforts to provide Maneri with his initial accommodation when he began going to Bihar for Friday prayers and make himself available to those who wished to consult him. People who wanted to meet Maneri would thus be spared the thirty kilometre journey to Rajgir. Qaseem Sahib, in his Urdu translation (p.354), is also of this opinion.
- 326. The Persian is *berna rasad*. The sentence has to be taken as a quotation, since 'Me' clearly refers to God.
- 327. The divorce formula becomes effective and irrevocable only when the word *talaq* (divorce) is pronounced three times.
- 328. Daulatabad, the city founded in 1327, was meant to be the southern capital of Muhammad bin Tughluq, Sultan of Delhi from 1325-1351. As letter 91 is addressed to Qazi Husamuddin who, from the contents of the letter, is clearly in Daulatabad, it is possible that he is the recipient of this letter as well.
- 329. The text has *ruh*, *nafs* and *qalb*. In this context it does not seem as though *nafs* has the normal, pejorative connotation highlighted by the adjective, 'selfish,' which, for the sake of consistency, is added here.
- 330. This statement should not be taken in a strict mathematical sense. It is meant to give the reader a jolt and galvanize him into more committed activity.
- 331. In letter 52, addressed to Malik Shamsuddin, another cap of Maneri's spiritual guide, Sheikh Najibuddin Firdausi, was sent to the addressee.
- 332. The reference is to Maneri's first collection of letters, *The Hundred Letters*, written to Qazi Shamsuddin in Chausa, Bihar, during 1346-47. It shows how widely popular they had quickly become.
- 333. The recipient of this letter seems to have left Bihar Sharif, where he had been able to receive regular guidance from Maneri, and gone elsewhere. There had been some apprehension that this might adversely affect the work of seeking union with God.
- 334. This verse is based on the first half of the *shahada*: "There is no god but God."
- 335. The word means, "Of the West." In some manuscripts it is followed by the invocation, "The mercy of God be upon him!" This implies that he is dead. The most probable explanation of this invocation is that Sheikh Maghribi had died by the time this collection was compiled in 1368. It should thus be attributed to the compiler. In his Urdu translation, Qaseem Sahib puts it in brackets on page 381, thus implicitly agreeing with this assessment. He explicitly states this in a note on page 384.

- 336. Kara was the name of one of the provinces established by Muhammad bin Tughluq. It was situated to the south and west of Allahabad.
- 337. Some manuscripts have '*Bistala*.' It was obviously a remote settlement somewhere in Kara province.
- 338. It is necessary to complete the Quranic sentence in order to understand the import of this quotation: "And anyone who has been blind in this life will stay blind in the life to come."
- 339. Firuz Shah was Sultan of Delhi from 1351 till 1388.
- 340. Malik ibn Anas (d.795) was the outstanding traditionist of Medina. The Malikites, one of the four main schools of Law in Islam, are named after him.
- 341. The reference is to Muhammad bin Tughluq.
- 342. The reference is to the Glorious Quran itself.
- 343. The reference is to the Sufi martyr, al-Hallaj, who was executed in Baghdad in 922.
- 344. Shah bin Suja was the son of Abul Fawaris al-Kirmani. As his name indicates, he was of royal birth. He became a Sufi master and died in 903.
- 345. Sa'duddin Hamuya was a fourteenth-century Sufi who based his saying on the superiority of the letter 'w' for *wilayat* (sainthood) over the letter 'n' for *nubuwat* (prophethood) in the mystical hierarchy of letters. Maneri gives an orthodox interpretation to this startling assertion.
- 346. The terms used, respectively, in the Persian for the various 'worlds' are: *milk*, *malakut*, *jabarut*, & *lahut*. Whatever be the precise meaning and reality referred to by these speculative terms, the point being made is that there is an inclusive hierarchy in creation, and the Sufi gradually ascends, through this hierarchy, to God. Nothing, however, is repudiated. In practical terms, as the following letter indicates, a genuine Sufi never repudiates the demands of the Law, e.g., to remain faithful to the five obligatory daily prayers.
- 347. The reference is to Bayazid.
- 348. The reference is to Muhammad.
- 349. The reference is to the eighth century of the Islamic calendar.
- 350. Although only the first aya (verse) of *sura* (chapter) 113 is mentioned, it is obvious that the whole *sura*, consisting of only five very short verses, is meant to be recited.
- 351. This whole *sura* of six short verses is also meant to be recited.
- 352. The *Fatiha* is the opening *sura* of the Quran.
- 353. Again, the whole *sura*, of four short verses, is intended.
- 354. Qazi Zainuddin is mentioned in letter 43. He brought news about a senior disciple, Qazi Sadruddin, the addressee of that letter. Qazi Zainuddin also delivered thirty pieces of silver to Maneri's most senior disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, as he himself reports in letter 139, *Maktabat-i Muzaffar Shams Balkhi*, Persian MS no. 1859/A in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.
- 355. The minor ablution, *wuzu*, is performed before ritual prayer. The hands, face, arms up to the elbows and finally the feet are washed.
- 356. The major ablution, *ghusl*, a full bath, is performed when a major impurity occurs. In India it is customary to have a full bath before the Friday congregational prayer.
- 357. As this collection was made in 1368 and Maneri died on 2nd January, 1381, he lived at least another 12 years.

358. Maneri is referring to himself. His words are not to be taken literally. They are symbolic expressions of the profound sense of his own nothingness in comparison to the Wonder that is God.

359. This statement is confirmation of what a discerning reader will already have grasped. It is rare indeed to find such a clear admission of an autobiographical source. All of Maneri's teaching, however, being ultimately grounded in personal experience, has this quality.

360. Muhammad.

361. Satan.

362. Al-Hallaj.

363. *Qalandars* were itinerant Sufis who paid scant attention to the Law.

364. This word means "a wealthy merchant." Maneri gently urges him to put his material wealth to work so that he can be closely associated with the poor and partake of their spiritual wealth in the world to come.

365. Some readers will recognize this 'section' of hell as referring to what they know as 'purgatory'. The central idea is the "purification of love" which occurs 'there' and the "special paradise" is, for Maneri, nothing less than the vision of God.

366. This remark will be of particular interest to some readers. It also probably carries autobiographical overtones, in spite of the following disclaimer, for many shared their innermost pain and sorrow with Maneri.

367. The reference here, as elsewhere, is to a spiritual sonship. Maneri had only one natural son, Zakiuddin, born to him while he was in Sonargaon. From the time he left Sonargaon, probably in 1323, until his death in 1381, Maneri lived a celibate life.

368. Literally, "looking after shoes."

369. This is unusually strong language from Maneri. One is reminded of how he sent his chief disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, back to Delhi to complete his education, for he told him that his previous studies had all been undertaken for a selfish motive, not for the sake of God.

370. Bayazid Bistami, the famous Sufi, is meant.

371. Muhammad.

372. Muhammad.

373. Ahmad Bihari was a controversial ecstatic who used to visit Maneri in Bihar township. He moved to Delhi. Firuz Shah Tughluq, the Sultan of Delhi (1351-88), tells us he had him imprisoned. The Persian in the present text has *miguyand* (they are saying). Maneri does not use the prefix *mi* for ordinary present tense. Its use is rare, and indicates the present continuous tense. It is likely that this letter was written while Ahmad Bihari was still in prison. Later on he was executed for statements which were considered to be heretical.

374. Given the previous reference to Ahmad Bihari, it seems that this is a reference to his impending capital punishment.

375. This collection of letters was compiled by 770 A.H.

376. Maneri is referring to himself.

377. When one comes across statements like this it is necessary to distinguish between what could be called theological statements from experiential ones. Maneri accepted an Ash'arie theological framework, but interpreted it according to his own experience.

He never tires of repeating that God does whatever He wants, but this God is full of mercy, compassion and love. He is not a capricious despot. How does Maneri reconcile all this? He clings to God, but "God knows best" is his comment when it comes to theological disputes. In fact, he sharply reprimanded his chief disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, for disparaging remarks made during a dispute about whether the Quran was created or uncreated. Maneri was neither a philosopher nor a speculative theologian. He was a very learned, warm human being, and a spiritual guide par excellence.

378. The model is the Ascent of the Prophet. The people referred to were close companions of the Prophet, according to such Sufi works as *Kashf ul-Mahjub*. Maneri explains its meaning for a dervish.
379. The addressee is Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, Maneri's chief disciple and successor. Maneri's use of the title 'Imam' is an indication of the high esteem in which Muzaffar was held for his intellectual attainments.
380. These words are attributed to Bayazid Bistami.
381. These words are attributed to al-Hallaj.
382. Maneri probably has himself in mind. As far as other people are concerned, Maneri is a saint, a mystic, a learned man and an accomplished spiritual guide. He himself, however, has had such a profound experience of God that he considers himself of no consequence whatsoever. Whatever he is, is of God.
383. The allusion is to the different shapes of the two Arabic letters.
384. This is undoubtedly Qazi Shamsuddin, recipient of The Hundred Letters. Note the repeated affectionate address, "Dear friend!"
385. Muhammad
386. This switch to the first person in the text itself, as distinguished from a quotation, is most unusual in Maneri's writings. Quotations - normally from the Quran or *Hadith* – are in Arabic. It seems that Maneri has gone straight to the Persian translation of what is meant to be a quotation.
387. From the title it seems most likely that the addressee was the prayer-leader – imam – in an important mosque. It is also possible, though less likely, that he was a famous scholar who was respectfully addressed as 'Imam.'
388. The name is also given as Muhallab in one manuscript.
389. This well-known Sufi of Nagor, author of *Lawami'*, (Flashes of Light), died in 1274. The present letter is also found as letter no. 15 in *The Twenty-Eight Letters* written to Muzaffar Shams Balkhi. The reader will notice how different this letter is from the previous ones. It is because it, as well as letter 140, is from the collection referred to. These letters were meant specifically for Muzaffar, not for a general readership.
390. There is a gap from here till letter 140 in MS 1396 (b) the main manuscript used in this translation. Other MSS were utilized to translate these letters.
391. A process of discernment is being discussed. Does a particular spiritual experience originate from one's self, or from God?
392. More lines are quoted in letter no. 15 in *The Twenty-Eight Letters*.
393. Muzaffar Shams Balkhi is being referred to. Maneri is confident that he can guide Fakhrudin along the Sufi Path.
394. Abu Ali Daqqaq (d.1015 ?) was a famous Sufi Sheikh. He was the master and father-in-law of Qushayri (d.1074), author of the well-known early treatise on Sufism, the *Risala*, composed in 1046.

395. The *Ihya Ulum ud-Din* is the most famous work of al-Ghazali (d.1111), the renowned Muslim theologian who became a Sufi. The verse quoted by Labid, a contemporary of Muhammad, is found on p. 169 of Guillaume's translation of the *Sirat Rasul Allah*, the earliest extant biography of Muhammad.
396. This letter is to Muzaffar Shams Balkhi. It is no. 17 in *The Twenty-Eight Letters*.
397. The reference is to the first part of the Muslim profession of faith: "There is no god but God."
398. Wahb bin Munabbih, as mentioned by Guillaume, was an early Muslim from Yemen who narrated the story of the origin of Christianity in that part of Arabia.
399. Qazi Zainuddin brought news of Qazi Sadruddin in Sonargaon, Bangladesh, to Maneri, as mentioned at the beginning of letter 43, and was also the bearer of a gift of thirty pieces of silver from Maneri to his foremost disciple, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, as mentioned in letter 139, pp.422-3, in the *Maktubat-i Muzaffar Shams Balkhi*, (Letters of Muzaffar Shams Balkhi), Persian MS no. 1859/A in the Khuda Bakhsh Library.



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